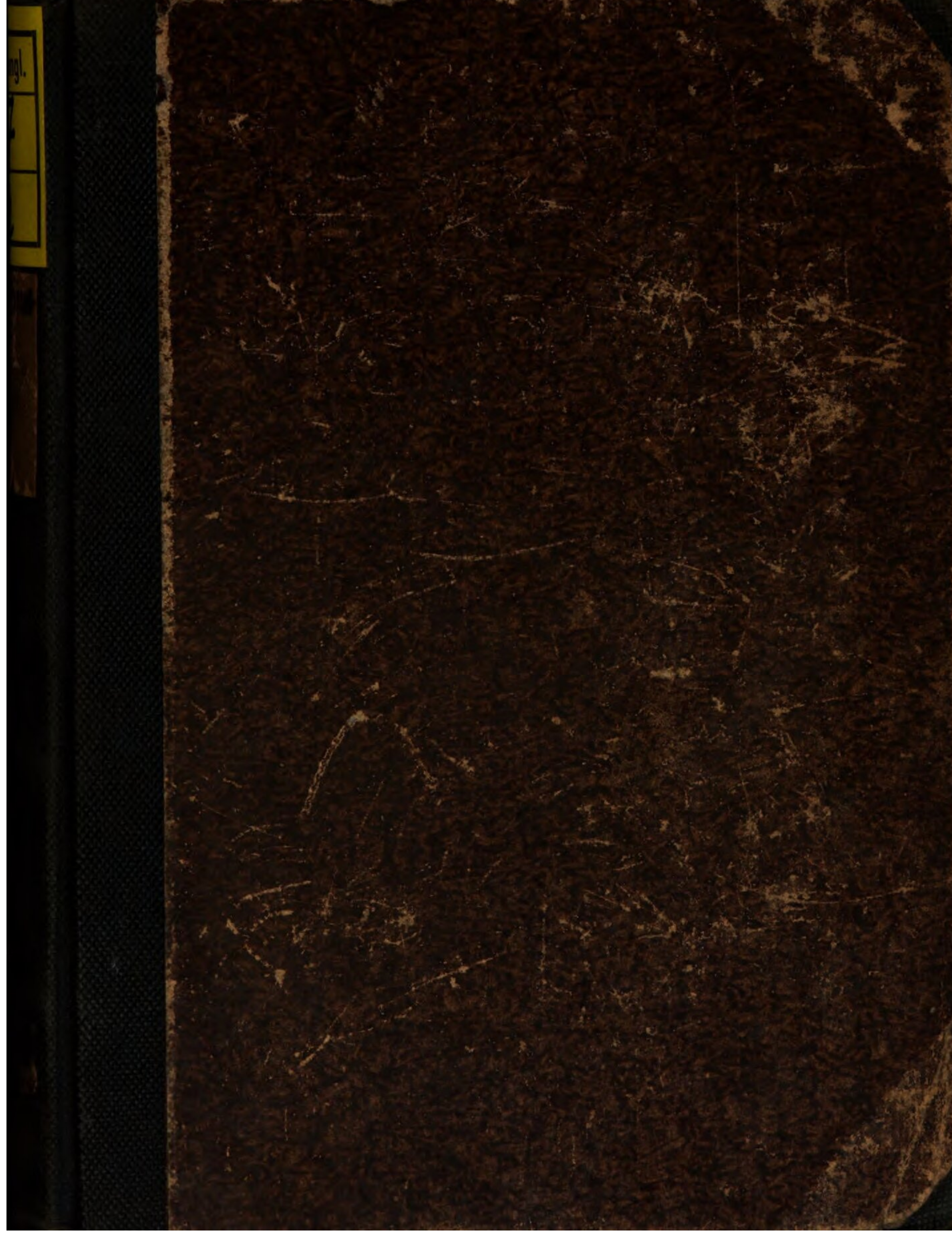




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HAUNTED HEARTS

COLLECTION
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VOL. 720.

HAUNTED HEARTS BY MARIA S. CUMMINS.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE LAMPLIGHTER	1 vol.
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HAUNTED HEARTS.

BY

MARIA S. CUMMINS,

AUTHOR OF "THE LAMPLIGHTER," ETC.

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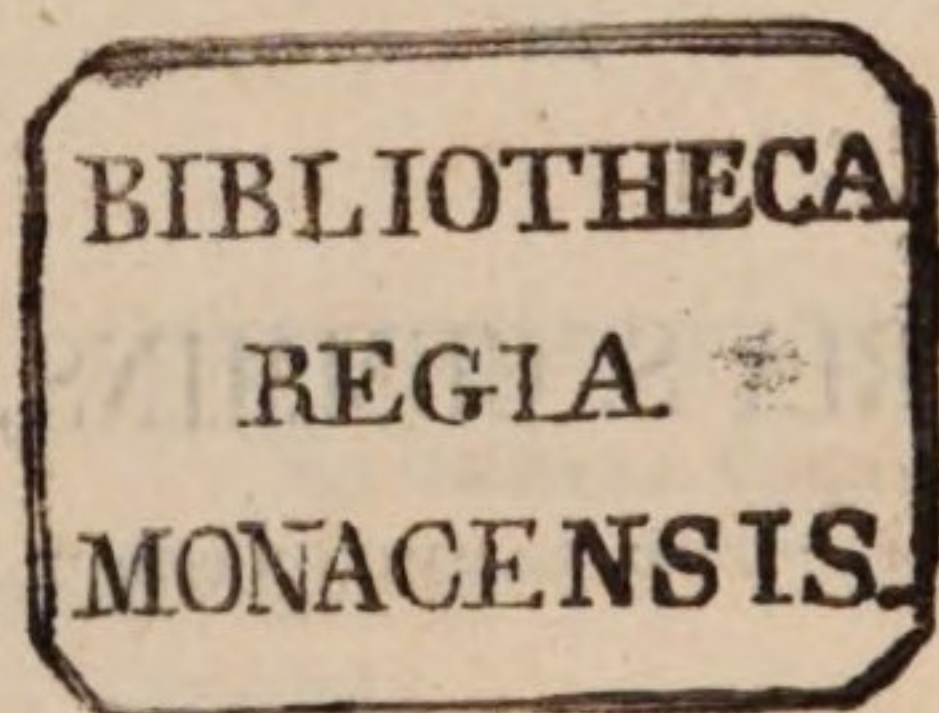
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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HAUNTED HEARTS.



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HAUNTED HEARTS.

CHAPTER I.

The Old Dutch Tavern.

EVERY circle has its centre. To describe a circle one must choose a given point, and radiate thence at equal distances. The north-eastern corner of New Jersey is that part of the earth's surface on which I propose to describe a circle, and the centre of that circle is Stein's tavern.

Stein's tavern, then, is my starting point. But why be in haste? The weather is cold, for it is winter, it is nearly dark, for the days are at the shortest. To strike out into the country is to expose oneself to solitude and poor cheer, for the neighbourhood is thinly populated, and not much given to hospitality.

The reverse of all this is the case at Stein's. It is warm there, for great wood fires are blazing in all the chimneys. It is light in spite of the gathering darkness without, for the windows glow with the flame of an unusual number of lamps and candles; there is a prospect of good company, too, if one may judge from the echo of voices in and about the house, the number of vehicles crowding the stables and sheds, and the multitude of country people, on foot, on horseback, or in carriages, who are converging towards this convivial centre.

It is evidently no time to turn one's back on Stein's tavern; so we will linger awhile at this place of entertainment, at least, until the party breaks up and the other guests take leave.

Stein's tavern is a heavy-browed Dutch building, standing close upon the main road, which it fronts, and only separated from another highway which cuts the former at right angles by the tavern-yard.

The question might here arise, whether anything can be termed a yard, which is merely a vast space, for the most part unsodded, dusty, littered with chips, ox-yokes, cart-wheels, everything, indeed, which is useless and unsightly, and in no way limited or enclosed, otherwise than by the roads which constitute two of its boundaries, the long stretch of building which flanks it on the inner side, and the barns and other outbuildings which are huddled together in its rear. But who has not seen just such yards?

The building itself is liberal in its dimensions, presenting a vast deal of surface in proportion to the actual accommodation it furnishes; is painted white in front, and red everywhere else; and boasts, like most New Jersey houses, a very unnecessary number of doors and windows. As there is an entrance at the side of the house, opening upon the yard, and two of equal pretensions facing the road, it would be difficult to decide which constituted the main approach, or honorary threshold, were not this question determined by a Dutch inscription over one of the front doorways, announcing food and drink for man and beast. To this advertisement of the character and purpose of the building is subjoined the date, A.D. 1710. As it is on the evening of December 23rd, 1812, that we have alighted at this doorway, the two dates, taken in connection, betray the building to be now more than a hundred years old.

This old tavern has a history, and if memorable events had left their mark on wood and plaster, its walls would be written all over with meaning inscriptions. Its oaken frame, hewn on the other side of the Atlantic, and planted in its present position in early colonial days, has outstood several generations, survived successive wars, and in some degree shared the fortunes of the new republic. New Jersey, protected by its remoteness from the frontiers, had been spared

the disasters and cruelties that attended the French and Indian warfare, but her soil had, in later years, been overrun by British and Hessian soldiers, and the two consecutive campaigns, which resulted so successfully for American arms, and made this little State classic ground, had seen her settlers pillaged, impoverished and cruelly insulted by a lawless soldiery. The principal public-house of the district, standing unprotected at the junction of two highways, was at once a temptation and a mark. To-day privileged to furnish shelter and afford refreshment to the untiring patriot, who, during a winter of hardship and discouragement, was cheering and keeping alive the spirit of a handful of sick and destitute men, the cross-road inn found itself on the morrow exposed to the ravages of foreign ruffians, who, successful in some neighbouring skirmish, or retreating after some disastrous engagement, made the tavern the scene of their triumphant revels, or barricaded it for their temporary defence, in either case, robbing its larder, destroying its furniture, browbeating the landlord, driving away his cattle, and dispersing his household.

Poor Hans Stein (for it was Stein's tavern then) would creep back, after each such instance of robbery and wrong; and, finding the late danger past, collect his fugitive family together, and endeavour to repair his losses, stem the tide of poverty, and hope for better days. Better days came at last, — days of peace, law, and prosperity; right triumphed over might, and the land was free. But repeated misfortunes had left Hans Stein old and poor. True, the tavern still stood upright in its strength, and the adjacent land, for a circuit of some acres, was the property of Stein. But the house had been despoiled of the few comforts and valuables which years of industry had enabled Hans to accumulate; the crops had been swept from his land, his barns and out-buildings had been burned. During the severe winter of 1776-7, which he and his family had passed in exile and wandering, his thrifty dame had died of an illness induced by exposure and aggravated by home-sickness.

When in the chill days of March, reassured by the report that the British had been driven from the neighbourhood, Stein ventured back to his deserted premises, discouragement met him at the very threshold. His doors were broken from their hinges, his windows shattered; snow had swept through the passages, and accumulated in drifts in the corners, and the wind rushing down the wide chimney had brought with it a shower of soot, and darkened the once clean and sanded kitchen floor. Even the old house dog, who, true to his trust, had never deserted the homestead on occasions of alarm, and who, after earlier and briefer absences on the part of his master, had always met him on his return with a proud look and a wag of the tail, which seemed to indicate the valorous part he had played in the preservation of the property, even poor Donner had fallen a victim to his fidelity, and the body of the loyal beast, ignominiously slain, and hanging stiff and stark in the doorway, was the ghost of the past, and the omen of the future, which constituted Stein's welcome home.

The old Dutchman was no longer capable of resisting memory or defying fate. He slunk down at his cheerless hearthstone, closed his lips upon a smouldering pipe, uttered no complaints, but became thenceforward a prey to infirmity and helplessness.

That which was despair to Hans, however, was opportunity to his son Diedrich. Hans had a generous soul, and prosperity was its element; Diedrich's was a narrow nature, that could endure straits. Hans was jovial and craved sunshine; Diedrich was sulky, and clouds and fogs suited his humour. Hans was soft-hearted, and so had been crushed by misfortune; Diedrich was hard, and difficulties sharpened him. Father and son had never co-operated, either as farmers or publicans; so the latter had looked on, sullenly biding his time, — and his time had come. The old man sat now in the chimney-corner. There was no other son to rival Diedrich; Margaret, the faithful daughter, and the useful drudge, was indispensable in the household; but Diedrich

was farmer, landlord, master. He thrived. A few weeks saw the house in tolerable repair. In as many months a temporary barn had been built, preparations for tilling the land had commenced on a small scale, and the bar-room was opened to customers. In process of time, outbuildings reared themselves, of more pretensions than Hans had ever dreamed of in his best days, a new wing was added to the house, and Stein's tavern became a place of reputation and resort, well known for a distance of thirty miles around, and familiarly spoken of in the city of New York itself.

The notoriety of this country inn was due to two causes. First, to the natural advantages of its locality. Secondly, to the sagacious and time-serving landlord, who knew how to make the most of them. Neither of these elements of success was obvious to the superficial observer. The tavern, it is true, had been judiciously placed at the junction of two roads, each connecting market-towns, and consequently much travelled by the neighbouring farmers. It thus served as a half-way house, a stopping place, and a rendezvous for the people of the district. But this after all, was a small source of profit, and, except the occasional custom thus afforded, the house seemed remote from all chance of public favour and patronage. The nearest village was four miles distant, and was approached by the cross-road, which, in this direction, was a well-graded highway and easy of travel, but which, as it stretched back into the country, presented a continuous ascent, and led finally across a wild and lonely elevation known as the mountain, being the only high and mountainous land in the vicinity, a stray bit of some Alleghany ridge already memorable as having often furnished a natural observatory to General Washington, during his winter campaign in New Jersey; notorious in later years as the scene of an event which I am about to relate in these pages.

Though this cross-road was a thoroughfare much frequented by farmers from the interior of the district, the fact that it did not furnish a connecting link with the city of New York, rendered it of second-rate importance compared with the main-

road, which communicated directly with the great metropolis. This main-road may be described in one word — such was its monotony. For two miles in the direction leading to the city, it stretched away at a dead level unvaried by a single hillock, and with only here and there a farm-house or barn to break the dreary prospect. For two miles in the opposite direction the road was a counterpart to this, broad, straight, and so evenly graded, that a foot-passenger at its further extremity was on a direct line of vision with the idler who watched his approach from the tavern door.

Small prospect of diversion this place afforded to the tavern idler one would think, and seldom would his watch be rewarded by any variation in the dull uniformity of the landscape; not so. And why? Because Stein's tavern, lonely, bleak, and bare, was the centre of the finest race-course in the whole country round.

Fame has its beginnings, and Stein's Plains had once boasted only a local reputation. Jolly old Hans would laugh until his sides shook, to see Jock the pedler and Schell the market-gardener invariably whip up, as they left his door and emulously make for the city at a plunging canter, this being the only pace, out of a walk, of which either of their poor beasts was capable.

The genial-tempered landlord would encourage the farmers' sons to test the mettle of their half-broken colts on his racing ground; with his head cocked on one side, and an occasional whiff at his pipe, he would measure the speed of the animals, pronounce upon their points, clap the owner of the best horse on the shoulder, and invite all the young men to take a drink.

Thriftless Hans little anticipated a time when the lines would be marked out and the race-course measured, when the city gentry would pour out in throngs to witness the sport, when his place would be filled by a score of more accomplished judges, when high-bred horses would await the signal, and his son Diedrich hold the stakes.

Simple Hans might even have doubted, whether all this

would benefit society or help to build up his own fortunes, but far-seeing Diedrich had no such scruples. He knew — and acted on the knowledge — how to make other men's pleasures, follies, and sins, all tend to the lining of his own pocket. Sly himself, he contrived to win confidence; selfish, he nevertheless achieved a sort of popularity; suspected by individuals, his character stood well with the public.

How he contrived to cater to all men's tastes and receive their patronage in return, and what had proved the result of a proprietorship, now of some thirty years' standing, we shall best learn by mingling freely with the crowd assembled in and around the cross-road inn, on the evening of the above-mentioned December twenty-third.

CHAPTER II.

A Comfort or a Curse — Which?

It is about five o'clock. There is a comparative lull in the excitement of the occasion, for the afternoon races are over, and the ball, which is to many the climax of the festivities, has not begun. The crowd, however, is at its height, the frequenters of the race-course not having yet dispersed, while the patrons of the evening pastime are already pouring in. Parties having a long ride in prospect are fortifying themselves, individually, or in groups, some at a select table in the tavern parlour, some drawn around the kitchen hearth, some hovering in the neighbourhood of the bar. Orders for refreshment are issued on all sides, the maid-servants are hurrying hither and thither, and two awkward farmer boys, drafted for the occasion, are stumbling over each other in the passages. Still, on the whole, the attendance is good, and the supplies ample, for old Stein is eagle-eyed, and his patient wife is slaving herself to death in the pantry, as she has been ever since she was his wife, and will be till she dies.

Above stairs everything is in a buzz of anticipation. The rooms on the second floor have been allotted to the fresh ar-

rivals, and here the farmers' wives, decked in tall turbans and Sunday finery, are enjoying something more than a Sunday's gossip, while their daughters are tying on high-heeled slippers, or struggling to get a place at the mirror; or, with toilet completed to their satisfaction, are humming a lively air and keeping time to it with impatient feet; while, now and then, the bolder sort are darting into the entry way, chatting saucy nonsense to some country beau coming up the stairs, or peeping through the rails with a half-suppressed titter intended to attract the attention of some city gallant loitering in the hall below.

Outside the house the scene is even noisier and more confused. Here horses are harnessed and unharnessed, horses are petted and praised, horses are abused and kicked. Men are laughing, talking, snapping whips, quarrelling, cheating and settling their bets. There are all expressions of face among them, from the exultant smiles of fortunate competitors to the sullen airs of their discomfited rivals; from the shrewd sidelong glance of the jockey, to the anxious features of his probable victim; from the indifference of the looker-on to the eagerness of the wrestler in the game of chance.

No one ventures to dispute the assertion of Stein, that the races have been successful — wonderfully successful — the most successful he has ever witnessed. There are many to echo this sentiment, annually expressed by the landlord, but there is more than one, who responds to it by mentally cursing Stein, his tavern, and his racecourse, as being at the bottom of all his ill fortune in life.

Among the former class, satisfied with the occasion and complacent towards the host, is a middle-aged gentleman, who has just mounted his curricule, and who, as he receives the reins from the hands of the landlord himself, exclaims, with good-humoured condescension — “Good-night, and a merry Christmas to you, Mr. Stein! you have forestalled the date a little, but that is all right; to-morrow is Saturday, and it would not do to let the young folks' ball run into the sabbath. Your

“races have gone off finely this year. I generally drive out to look on, and I never saw fleeter horses on the ground.”

“No one is a better judge than yourself, sir,” said Stein, bowing, hat in hand, and bestowing a diplomatic glance on the handsome pair to whom the New York merchant was just giving the reins.

“I don’t much approve of this horse-racing,” remarked the merchant, as he somewhat vainly watched the even trot of his own horses, and addressed the respectable lawyer who was the companion of his drive — “but our young men will have their sport, and these annual meetings furnish the best opportunity for completing one’s stud. I want a better match for that off-horse, if I can find one — and setting aside the races, it is worth one’s while to step over into Jersey, to dine off a canvas-back, served as one gets them at Stein’s. Honest fellow, that Stein! — Take care there!” and the fine gentleman pulled up just in time to avoid running over a rough, elderly farmer, who, with his broad-brimmed hat pulled low over his forehead, was crossing the road, on his way to the tavern, without looking to the right or left.

“Bless me!” cried the farmer, as he stepped aside, and stood staring after the curricule, which, the obstacle removed, rolled rapidly on, “how these New Yorkers sweep the road! they don’t leave a Jarseyman room to steer!”

“Don’t let ’em run you down, neighbour Rycker!” exclaimed a voice just beside him. “They drive like the ‘devil on two sticks,’ them fellers do, specially arter dinner — but the plains is free ground, and they’re bound to turn out for a man, whether or no.”

“Wal,” said old Rycker, retreating to the grassy roadside, and keeping a flank look-out, as another light vehicle approached from the tavern, “I reckon I’d better take a safe course, and go round the stump — that’s my way, allers.”

“You’re an easy old cove, Rycker, and the right one for them folks to deal with,” remarked his neighbour. “It stirs

my blood a leetle to see how them city chaps rides it over the old settlers. You didn't jine in the races, farmer?"

"No, no," replied Rycker, facetiously; "my hosses was busy at the plough."

"I jest see your red colt up at the shed," said the other; "young Joe's been puttin' him over the road, I reckon."

"Joe fetched up his marm and the gals about an hour ago in the wagon. They hadn't no room to spare — what with all their gimcracks and cockatoos — so I footed it."

"The ball's what you've come fur then, is it?"

"Wal, yes. If the gals and boys likes to stir their stumps, I've no objections to lookin' on, and hearin' a brisk tune or so on the fiddle."

"Old Cato plays lively yet," was the answer to this remark; "some on 'em 'll dance hearty to his music to-night, I'm thinkin', and then agin, some on 'em won't."

"Ah, that's the wust on't!" said old Rycker, "that's the reason, to speak truth, neighbour Van Hausen, that I've gin up the races, and keep Joe out of 'em when I can. I allers calkerlate to have more business than ordnary on hand these days, if it's only to keep the boy at home. When folks set their hearts on the legs of a hoss, they stand a good chance to be disappointed, and sarves 'em right — they're a pack o' fools, all on 'em."

"Wal, ginerally speakin'," said Van Hausen, "I wouldn't pitch a copper who wins, either way; but if Geordie Rawle will be fool enough to run his brown mare agin the stuff them city blades stake their money and their souls on, why, you may depend on't, Dick Van Hausen's heart is purty sure to be sot on the mare's legs."

"Geordie's mare! Do tell, now!" cried Rycker, with animation. "Has anybody's beast gone ahead o' that? Geordie's mare's a lady; what did Geordie put her on the course fur?"

"Cause he's a fool, I reckon!" said Van Hausen.

There was a moment's silence between the two men. "Look here, Dick," said Rycker, at length, taking his neigh-

bour by the button, and speaking confidentially, "what do 'yer think about that boy? Will he be a comfort to his poor old mother or a cuss?"

"Dun' know," responded Van Hausen, gravely.

"Geordie 'd no business to do it," mused Rycker, aloud; "his father's son had no business to do it;" then adding, looking inquiringly at Van Hausen, "I 'spose he bet on her, too?"

"'Spose so," was the brief answer.

"It'll kind o' discourage him," said Rycker, softening.

"Kind o'? You ought to have seen them two — Geordie and the mare — look each other in the eye arterwards," said Van Hausen. "I tell you, them two felt jest of a piece; they was ashamed — they was mad — they was desprate."

"He'll have to sell her, won't he?" asked Rycker.

"Give her away, more like," said Van Hausen. "Last week that mare would ha' brought a purty price. Who wants her now? She was a fancy beast allers, and there was many a young blade had his eye on her; but Geordie held off till arter the races; dun know whether 'twas his pride in the crittur, or whether he thought he'd get a louder figur. Game's up now; he'll have to let her go for what she'll fetch."

"Poor boy," said Rycker, "he sets a sight by her."

"Who can wonder?" exclaimed Van Hausen. "That ere colt was born the night his father died. Farmer Rawle bred the finest hosses that were raised in the Jarseys, but none on 'em came up to this 'ere. There was consid'able stock on the farm when Rawle died, but only this fraction of a hoss did Geordie get out on't — 'twas his inheritance, farmer — his inheritance, the only plum he got out of the pie!"

"So small, it was overlooked?" queried Rycker, significantly.

"Jest so — farmer, jest so; else you may be sure Stein's long fingers would ha' grabbed it. Where did the best hosses and cows that are in his barn now, first learn to nibble grass? Down in Rawle's meader, I swear."

"Rawle owed Stein money, I 'spose?"

"Can't say. Stein settled the estate of course. Who else could the widder look ter? Settled it much to his own fancy, I reckon."

"Pity on the whole," said Rycker, "that he didn't take a fancy to Geordie's colt 'long wi' the rest. It's been only a mischief to the boy. Fust, he must needs raise it, then break it, and then ride round the country on it. Turns a boy's head to have a racer made to his hand — and a race-course running within a stone's throw of his mother's door. Now, when I was a youngster, there weren't no harm in boys matchin' their colts; but now-a-days it's about the wust thing they could turn their hand ter."

"And whose fault's that, I want ter know?" questioned Van Hausen, sharply. "'Tain't Geordie's doin's that racin's come to be such a temptation in these parts. No, he owes that as well's other things to his uncle Stein. Ever since old Hans was under ground, Diedrich has been makin' this place a snare for men's souls, and featherin' his nest with the profits. I can remember when this used to be the peaceablest road you could travel on — and now, there isn't a month in the year that these 'ere highfliers ain't a-gettin' up some kind of a scrape, an' Stein a-backin' 'em up in't."

"It's e'en a'most enough to make old Hans rise out of his grave, that this 'ere road by his tavern-door should prove the road to ruin fur poor Margaret's boy," said Rycker.

"Ha, ha, neighbour!" said Van Hausen, "if old Hans's ghost ever meant to rise, 'twould ha' stood up an' protested on Margaret's wedding-day, when Diedrich sent her out of her father's house a beggar."

"Didn't Rawle and his wife get Margery's share of the tavern, house, and farm? I'll take my oath she was entitled to that, an' a many years' wages too. She drudged in the tavern kitchen a good ten year or more, to my knowledge."

"She got a board-bill, farmer — yes, a board-bill, heavy enough to eat up her share of the whole consarn. Farmer Rawle told me so, in his last sickness, and I believe it; it only

adds one figure to a long score that'll come up agin that Stein at the day o' judgment."

"Hush, hush, Van Hausen!" said Rycker, in a tone of mild reproof; "that's a day when each on us 'll have an account of our own to settle, an' nothin' to do with our neighbours."

"Hush, hush! O yes, it's sure to be hush, hush! where Diedrich Stein is consarned. There's allers somethin, turns up to muzzle men's mouths if they ventur' to open 'em agin him. But what's the use o' talkin', the Rawles chose to pocket the wrong, an' it's too late to right 'em now; besides, Geordie dun know nothin' about it, an' if he did, he ain't one to be rakin' up old scores."

"It's better so, it's better so," remarked Rycker; "'twould only be calkerlated to set the boy agin' his relations."

"I ain't so sure it's better so," said Van Hausen; "forewarned 's forearmed, and I've some notion o' givin' Geordie a warnin.' It goes agin my grain to see that boy hangin' round the tavern and keepin' in so thick with the Steins. I was at work for Stein a whole summer, when I was 'prentice to my trade, as long ago as when he built on the t'other end o' the tavern house — my knowledge on him dates back twenty year. He ain't a four-square man, and they're a disjinted set, all on 'em;" and the honest carpenter accompanied this professional diagnosis of the Stein character with an emphatic blow upon the ground with his oaken stick.

"Wal now, if I was you, Van Hausen," advised Rycker, "I wouldn't set Geordie to rootin' out mischief; he'd better go round the stump; family quarrels is bad, and there's a double connection in the family, yer know."

"Hang the connection!" ejaculated Van Hausen, "I hain't a doubt but the connection was the reason for Rawle and Margery swallowing that board-bill whole. Stein had married Rawle's sister only a year or two afore, and Miss Stein was kind o' sick and broken down — she's allers kind o' sick and broken down, poor body. Margery was glad enough to get free of her brother on any tarms, I'm thinkin',

and Rawle was naturally soft about money matters. So they made it up; and what came on't? Why, when Rawle died, Stein stretched out his long fingers agin, and claimed — I dun know what — another board-bill perhaps, — ha, ha. Rawle and his wife had taken a meal now and then at the tavern, who knows? Anyhow, Stein had the fixin' o' things, an' the widder got little enough out o' the property. That's what come o' sticklin' for connection. Now I don't go in for connection — I go in for character. I'm about equally connected myself with the Rawles and the Steins, but I ain't equal in my likin' for both families, by a long shot."

"Don't you think you're rather hard on the Steins, Van Hausen?" said Rycker, "when you git your back up, you're real grit. But there's old Hans Stein never had an inimy — without 'twas the Britishers — and Geordie's own mother, she was a Stein. Steins and Rawles is purty well stirred up together — 'tain't best to make too nice distinctions."

"When I say Steins," responded Van Hausen, irritably, "I mean the present lot on 'em — Diedrich and his stock-in-trade, Peter, and that sly jade of a Poll. They're all much of a muchness, and I fur one have seen enough o' their mean ways."

"Wal, now, there's your brother-in-law, Baultie," continued Rycker, "he must have a purty good opinion o' Stein. He consults him on most pints, and if it wan't fur a visit at the tavern, off an' on, Baultie 'd be a hermit downright."

"Ah, farmer Rycker," said Van Hausen, raising his right arm as he spoke, and bringing it down with emphasis on Rycker's shoulder, "now you've struck a clincher! Ever since my sister Hannah married Baultie Rawle, I've seen how Stein — the old fox — was earthin' in that burrer. Maybe Baultie has money, maybe he hasn't; anyhow there'll be some pickin's yonder, and never a chick nor child to scratch for't. So old Stein's on the scent, and he'll nose it out, take my word for't."

"I allers thought Baultie had a lurch for Geordie, his own

brother's son," said Rycker. "It's no more'n fair Geordie should have a fair shake with the Steins."

"I tell yer, Rycker, fair play's not in Stein's catalogue o' human vartues. He cheated Geordie's mother, he cheated his father, and now he's underminin' the lad. Why, I can remember when Margery's boy half lived on the mountain with the old folks; they couldn't make enough on him; my sister was allers stuffin' him with jelly and pie, and old Rawle 'ud pat him on the head, an' say, What trade shall we bring him up ter, Dick? — or, Will ye go to college, Geordie? But how is't now? Why, if Baultie meets him on the road, he has nothing for him but a long face an' a scowl, and Dame Rawle shakes her head, and talks about wild doin's and folks comin' to the gallers. I tell yer nothin's cut Geordie up like the way the old folks ha' turned the cold shoulder on him."

"P'raps he desarves it," suggested farmer Rycker. "If all I've hearn tell on is true, Geordie's been running a pretty wild rig o' late."

"So he has," said Van Hausen. "I'm a tremblin' for him myself. But because a lad's shaky on the foundation, is that a reason for pullin' him down? Prop him up, I say, prop him up, an' he'll stand stout on his timbers yet. But what do some folks do in sech a case? Why, they pull out a nail here, an' loose a jint there, an' then call all the neighbours to look in at the chinks. My brother-in-law, Baultie, 's naturally short-sighted, and his wife 's deaf; who is it, I want ter know, that keeps their eyes an' ears open to all poor Geordie's sins?"

"Wal, sech things gets round," said Rycker.

"Gets round!" cried Van Hausen. "So they do when there's hands to keep 'em a spinnin'. I tell yer Stein's at the bottom on't. He's pizened the old man's mind, and pizenin' a man's mind is one kind o' murder."

"Oh! oh! oh! neighbour Van Hausen, them's hard words!" exclaimed Rycker. "Stein ain't answerable for all Baultie's crotchets, and if a man cries up his own son, and

reflects a leetle on another man's, by way o' comparison — why, that's kind o' nateral in fathers."

"Nateral, is it? Then, thank Heaven I never was a father," responded Van Hausen. "My hearth's a lonely one, farmer, but it's honest; so I'm fur home, an' a pipe, an' a mug o' beer. You'll need a hop in the tavern kitchen, Rycker, to warm up yer cold blood, and a glass o' sperits inter the bargain to wash down my hard words. I don't need any sich stirrin' up, or heatin,' myself. My blood's hot yet, if I am gettin' old. Good-night."

"Law's sakes alive! what a downright set them Van Hausens are!" soliloquized Rycker, as he came out of the shadow of the stables, where he had paused during the dialogue with his neighbour, and approached the warm, bright tavern. The place looked so cheery and inviting, it did not seem right to condemn the owner for a bad-hearted man. "I reckon Van Hausen goes a leetle too far," thought Rycker, "he's so prejudiced like. The Steins an' the Rawles is good-enough friends fur's I know. What does he want to stir up ill-blood atween 'em fur? It's best to b'lieve what yer know, and not everything yer've hearn tell on." And as Rycker was about to enjoy the hospitalities of the tavern (he expected to pay his share towards the music, and the supper — still it was none the less Stein's ball), he made up his mind to think charitably of the landlord — an opportune resolve, for the spare, keen-eyed host was the first to bid him welcome as he entered the doorway.

CHAPTER III.

Outstripped in the Race.

DIEDRICH STEIN was getting old — if that could be said with truth of a man who was old at thirty, and had been growing younger ever since. Not that he had gone back to the days of innocence, or sunk into the imbecility of second childhood, but in all those things which make a man active, prompt, and efficient, Stein's faculties were in their prime. Every year had made his features sharper, his eyes more deeply sunken, his frame more emaciated, but every year had served also to sharpen and intensify the inner man, until the sluggish, unsocial youth had ripened into the ubiquitous, mercurial little despot, whose eye, voice, and hand were, like everything else, in his household, the servants of his will. To look sharp, move quick, speak often, and to the purpose, were not the promptings of his nature, but they were the necessities of his business. Diedrich understood his business, overcame his nature, and through force of habit, became a new man. In his small sphere and countrified fashion, he was an autocrat, a diplomatist, almost a courtier.

"Glad to see you, farmer!" was his salutation to Rycker. "You're too late for the races, but just in season for the ball. Your good woman has been warming her feet at the fire upstairs for a half-hour, or more. If you're for something hot, one o' the gals will wait on you at the bar." "Off, Mr. Winn? you start early — but you carry weight, eh?" he exclaimed, addressing a young man in riding-boots, and with a long whip in his hand, who had just appeared in the doorway. "I'll join you presently, Rycker," spoken over his shoulder to the farmer, who looked shy and sheepish in the presence of the city gentry. "Some o' my guests just going — make yourself at home." "You're lucky on the course," with a congratulatory nod to Mr. Winn; "always are — runs in some families, you know." "You for town, too, Mr. Cipher?"

to a still younger man, with a crest-fallen countenance. "I thought, perhaps, you'd stay awhile, and join the juveniles in a dance."

"Dance! What, I?" responded young Cipher, with an oath, which seemed too big for his mouth, and so only half escaped.

"Oh, you're not quite up to it? Is that it, my boy? Your mind's running on your nag's broken knees. Never fear; he'll be all right in a week or two; just leave him in my stables; we'll fetch him round. That was an ugly stumble, but you must try him again one o' these days. Fortin's wheel's always going round — remember that — it will be your turn to be uppermost next time."

Here a sudden slap on Stein's shoulder caused him to turn quickly. "Stein, old fellow," exclaimed the jocular voice of a red-faced man, who had given the blow, "Ned Knuckle's in for a supper — Thursday of next week — that's the date. The best the market affords — that's the bill o' fare! Supper for twelve, and Ned Knuckle foots the bill."

"What does Stein care who foots the bill?" cried Ned Knuckle, emerging from the bar-room with an unsteady gait, and a cigar in his mouth. "What matter is it to Stein, so long's it brings grist to his mill?"

This remark was received with a laugh by a group of men who followed Knuckle into the hall.

"Stein hasn't any favourites," cried one.

"He spiles all his boys," said another.

"Makes no excep-ep-tions, and shows no p-p-partialities," hiccoughed a third.

"Only when he tips a wink to a customer," interrupted the red-faced man.

"And makes or breaks a bargain," growled a disappointed jockey.

Shouts, winks, and horse-laughes accompanied and echoed these little insinuations. Stein laughed too, a mechanical laugh of his which chimed in equally well with genuine mirth, drunken mirth, mirth of which he himself was the subject.

He had the discretion, however, to deprive his guests of their butt by stepping outside the doorway, where, standing with his hands behind his back, he watched or facilitated the departure of one after another who was in haste to be off."

"Fine evening, cap'n!" he remarked to a young man who was walking slowly up and down a little wooden platform that stretched across the front of the tavern. The young man, who had seemed abstracted and lost in reflection, paused on being thus addressed. "Yes, a very fine evening, landlord;" then, as if rousing himself for the first time to an observation of the scene around him, he added, "Many of your guests seem to be leaving, Mr. Stein? Driving back to the city, I suppose."

"Yes, the folks keep us pretty busy just about nightfall — what with going and coming both. How's your arm to-night, sir?" and Stein glanced at the young man's arm, which was suspended in a sling.

"Better, thank you — a little weak — that's all. The wound has healed entirely. I only wear the sling now when I am out of doors, as an additional protection from the cold."

"That's good," replied the landlord. "The country air suits you, sir; you've picked up wonderfully since you've done me the honour to put up at my house."

"Yes, the climate, and the accommodations have both suited me. You've made me very comfortable, Mr. Stein."

This was complimentary — so much so that the landlord bowed, as became him, and said a few words about having done his best. The young man had the easy air of one who feels quite at home. Still it was only necessary to watch Stein's manner towards him to be convinced that this guest at the tavern was looked upon as a distinguished personage. He talked familiarly enough with the landlord, questioning him with a listless sort of interest concerning local matters, especially the races, but he had the stylish air of a man of the world, and Stein's obsequious manner was unmistakable. The stranger's presence, too, seemed to exert an imposing effect upon the bystanders. The country-people stared at

him with mingled curiosity and awe, and the ambitious city blades who had chanced to exchange a few words with him on the race-course, or in the bar-room, which was the general lounging-place of the tavern guests, evidently courted his further notice; but the former he seemed quite unconscious of, and although he returned the salutations of the latter, it was with a glance of surprise, or a good-humoured condescension, which were more calculated to disconcert than to encourage. Only professed jockeys had the impudence to assume an air of intimacy in bidding him good-night, and his careless response was so much in the same tone in which he would have addressed his horse, that only a jockey could be flattered by it.

He sauntered up and down the platform a few times after his short conversation with Stein, tapping his boots somewhat affectedly with his bamboo stick, then paused again in the open doorway towards which the landlord was backing, accompanying the action with a succession of bows and scrapes to Ned Knuckle and his party, who were just driving off.

"It is growing cold, Mr. Stein, very cold," said the young man, slightly shivering, and buttoning up his coat — it was a military coat, and looked more military still as he buttoned it up tight.

"Good-night! you, cap'n, — you!" shouted Ned Knuckle, in drunken recklessness of military and aristocratic prerogative.

The captain gave the party very much such a glance as a naturalist might bestow upon poor specimens of a familiar species of insect.

"Hurrah for Ameriky!" shouted Ned, and the captain turned away in apparent disgust.

"Cold, Cap'n Josselyn, did you say?" said Stein, as anxiously as if it were his duty to apologize for the weather; "true, it is very cold."

"Is the fire lit in my room, Mr. Stein?"

"Fire — lit? Well, no — I'm afraid not. We'll have it done in a twinkling. Tea there, cap'n?"

"Yes."

"In half-an-hour, say."

"As soon as convenient."

"Have it immediately, sir;" and Stein bustled out in the direction of the kitchen, while Captain Josselyn walked upstairs to his room, scattering to the right and left, as he did so, a flock of young things who had settled round the staircase and balusters, and who, as he came up, fled to the bed-rooms or angles in the passage, not, however, until his ears had been assailed by the flutter of garments, and many a "Hush! quick! There he comes; that's the cap'n!" &c., accompanied by a subdued giggle; and one voice predominating above the rest, and saying, "Pooh! what are you afraid of? If you only knew him, girls! Why he's as perlite as he is handsome. Law, Cap'n Josselyn! I didn't know as you was within hearin'," and Polly Stein, who had purposely stood with her back to the stairs while her companions fled, bolted round just in time to meet the captain face to face at the head of the staircase.

"Ah, Miss Stein! you are all ready for the ball, I see," and the captain, with an air of gallantry, glanced approvingly at her white dress and tea-coloured shoes.

"Of course I am," said Polly, with a toss of the head. "I hope you mean to honour the ball with your presence, Cap'n Josselyn." She spoke with a bold familiarity which astonished the other girls; but then she lived in the house, and knew him so well.

They heard him answer, "Certainly, Miss Stein, and shall hope to enjoy a dance with you. Promise me now."

How polite he was, to be sure! How they all envied her! and how triumphant she looked when she came back after giving the promise!

The noise, excitement, and bustle that had prevailed ever since noon in the neighbourhood of Stein's tavern, was now concentrated within doors. Only two men lingered on

the front platform after Stein and his guest went in. The younger of these two had stood for some minutes gloomily eyeing the captain. "Who is he, any way?" he abruptly inquired of his companion, as the slight, military figure disappeared from view.

"They call him cap'n," replied the party thus addressed, — a coarse, clumsy fellow, with a dissipated countenance, "but I guess that's somethin' of a stretcher. He's only a lieutenant, if my information's sound."

"A lieutenant o' what?"

"Of His Majesty's roy'l navy."

"A Britisher, then! and an enemy! I thought as much."

"A Britisher, Mr. George, but not an enemy. He's laid by jist now, and can't fight. Besides, some folks say as how peace is goin' to be declared soon, and then we'll all be friends agin."

"Oh, hang the peace!" growled Mr. George, "and hang me if ever I'll be friends with such a puppy as that. What's he doing here?"

"Kind of amusin' himself. He's a gintleman prisoner, yer know, on a *prowl*, as they say — least-ways has been. I believe he's been swapped off fur one of our men lately, an' so's free to come an' go now."

"Amusing himself at other folks' expense! Devil take him!" muttered Mr. George. "Why don't he go if he's going? He's too big to keep company with Jersey folks. Why don't he take himself off?"

"P'raps he will," said the man, "when he gets through with his business in these parts."

"Business!" retorted the angry youth. "Unless he's got better business to do in the world than what he's been turning his hand to here, I wish our commodore had swung him up at the yard-arm, instead of bringing him into port. I'd like to give him a piece o' my mind, Nick, in a hand-to-hand fight," and the speaker clenched his fist as he spoke.

"Why, Mr. Geordie," said Nick, with an irritating

sort of laugh, "what great harm has the stranger done to you?"

"Brought my mare into disgrace, for one thing," answered George, "though that ain't the chief grudge I have against him neither," he added in an undertone.

"Wal, now, 'bout your mare," said Nick, in a conciliatory way; "that was clear, sheer accident, wan't it? jest as much as my givin' my finger a devil of a jam in a crack o' the barn-door. Deuce take the plaguy thing! — how it smarts!" and the man, as he spoke, unwound a dirty rag from the wounded member, examined the festering wound, and bound it clumsily up again.

"Accident! What, his presuming to mate a mean yellow-legged brute against my Nancy?"

"No, not that; that was jest the cap'n's ignorance. He's lived at sea, yer remember — what should he know 'bout hosses? But your Nancy's stoppin' short on the course, an' takin' steps to the tune o' 'Yankee Doodle,' — who'd a thought o' sich a thing as that?"

"I should," responded George, promptly. "Didn't I bring her up to it? It was one of her accomplishments. How should I know somebody in the crowd would whistle her off the course?"

"They did it p'rhaps by way o' cheerin' her on," intimated Nick. "It was showin' a preference for Nancy over the Britisher's nag, but unfortunately it worked the other way."

"Just my luck!" said George, despondently. "There's always somebody stands ready to cheer me on to ruin."

"'Cause you're so good-natured, Mr. George. You're jest like Miss Nancy — ready to dance to everybody's tune."

"Good-natured, am I?" questioned George, his boyish features contracted by a fierce frown, which seemed sufficiently to contradict Nick's assertion.

"Wal, not jest this minute," replied Nick, with his provoking laugh, and following the direction of George's eyes, which were fixed on an object coming slowly down the cross-

road. "You're dead set agin the Englishman, jest now. But the quarrel's all on one side, fur 's I can see. He don't scowl on you particklerly."

"He? O no, he's so tall he sees over my head." (Mr. George was six feet high, the captain a little fellow.) "Besides he's too much taken up with himself to have any time to spare for other folks. A peacock strutting round don't mind how many grass-hoppers he treads on."

"It's a fact," said Nick; "he's mighty indifferent — the most free and easy chap ever I see; lose or win, it's all the same to him — he don't care."

"Then he'd better look out how he interferes with them that do," said Georgie; and as he spoke he darted forward, his gesture betraying a sudden recognition of the object whose approach he had been watching.

It was an old-fashioned carryall — high, narrow, and rocking to and fro on its springs like a ship in a heavy sea. As it came within the circle of light which radiated from the tavern windows, the polished lustre of the door-handle, of the plated bar that formed a finish to the dasher, and of the rings in the horse's harness, bespoke the care bestowed upon the equipage; and though the leather of the carriage-top was rusty-brown, and the horse old and blind of one eye, the former was free from every spot of the red Jersey mud with which every other carriage-top in the district was habitually encrusted, and the latter, however much he might have loitered on the road, had, as usual, sufficient spirit in reserve at the end of his journey, to dash up to the door in fine style. As the arrival of this decrepit, but still genteel establishment never failed to produce a sensation, it was not strange that Mr. George should dart forward, that the attentive landlord should be on hand to welcome the occupants, and that still a third person, hearing the sound of the wheels, should run downstairs to assist the party in alighting.

Stein, bareheaded, and looking, in his loose-fitting brown suit, very much like a crumpled autumn leaf, stood bowing on

the platform before the small boy, who officiated as coachman, could climb down and open the carriage door.

"Welcome, very welcome, Mr. Cousin!" he said, addressing a spry little gentleman in a powdered wig, surmounted by a three-cornered beaver, who, as he leaned forward and put his head out of the window to give unintelligible directions to the boy concerning the management of the rickety door-handle, contrived to obscure whomever else the carriage might contain. "You keep genteel hours, Mr. Cousin; but then you're always genteel! None the less welcome for being late, though everybody else has come, and we had almost given you up."

Here Stein, whose sharp eyes had been peering diligently into the carriage, caught sight of a bit of pink silk hood, and announced his discovery in the words: — "Ah, Miss Angie, you're there, I see! I was beginning to think we should need to light extra lamps if your bright eyes were to be among the missing; but you've come at last — the last drop's always the sweetest, you know;" and old Stein smacked his lips as if he were thirsty, and had recognized in the pink hood something to drink.

Here the carriage door unexpectedly flew open, compelling the landlord to retreat a step or two, the little old gentleman in the cocked hat fell back into his own corner — the farther corner — and a figure wrapped in an old-fashioned silk mandarin, topped by a jaunty little hood, made a quick motion to alight. As she did so, she found herself face to face with Mr. George, whose manly form and bold movement, as he stepped up beside the carriage, were in strange contrast with the timid, beseeching look with which he met her eye. Before she could respond to it either by smile or frown, before she could even trip down the steps (there was quite a little staircase of them), all communication between herself and Mr. George was intercepted. A light, active figure had come between them; a civil "Excuse me, young man! stand aside a little if you please!" had effectually disconcerted Mr. George; and with an adroit but graceful and courtly manner,

the military stranger had caught the young girl's hand and drawn it through his arm. At the same time, although his other arm was a little stiff, he had managed to render with it that aid and civility to the old gentleman in the powdered wig which is becoming from youth to age, and had convoyed his daughter within the doorway, whispering in her ear a well-turned compliment. In a word, he had taken complete possession of the prize, and, though a fresh actor in the scene, had reduced all competitors to the rank of supernumeraries. Of course she was immensely flattered. It was such a tribute to her charms. To what other girl in New Jersey would this young aristocrat have shown such condescension? For a moment vanity quite paralyzed every other emotion. What must Geordie think at seeing her the object of so much gallantry? was a natural query in this connection. She could not resist giving one look to see how he took it.

He evidently took it hard. He was leaning against the door-post with his arms folded; the timid expression was gone out of his face, his lips were set tight, his attitude was dogged, and his eye dangerous. Some girls would have been frightened at seeing him so moved, but not Angie. She knew her power; there was coquetry in her, and courage, so she took the offensive.

"What makes you look so cross, Geordie?" she found time to say, as she passed him in the doorway.

There was no time for an answer — a spoken answer at least — but he started and glared fiercely at her, as a mastiff might do when struck. She answered him with a glance of scornful rebuke. He sank under it, subdued, as the faithful mastiff is subdued when he discovers that it is a master's hand which has dealt the blow.

Did I say the girl knew her power? No, she only half knew it. She knew she could anger — she believed she could soothe — him. She little suspected that while triumphing over the man she was evoking the brute. She saw the fire in his eye, and was proud of the heart she held in her hand. Had she seen the poor fellow shrink mortified beneath her scorn,

she would have felt that there is something degrading in a love that may be trampled on at will.

Geordie felt it. As he turned his back on the light, and the mirth, and the woman he loved, and dashed out in the direction of the cold, dark stable, he was less a man than he had been a few moments before. Hate, revenge, desperate resolve, all those evil passions that degrade humanity, were rampant in him. His soul was embittered against the world, his fellow-men, his destiny; but that was not the worst of it. He despised himself. He had sunk one step lower in his own esteem. Scarce caring where he went, he made for the stable, strolled into an empty stall, and threw himself down on some fresh hay. As he sat with his chin resting on his knees, and listened to the breathing of some tired horses (his own among the rest), who had spent their strength in that day's race and failed to win, the sum of his reflections was — "Just such a poor beast am I."

CHAPTER IV.

The Doubtful Value of George's Friends.

"Oh, Angie, is that you? how glad I am you're come!" was the universal salutation as this young woman entered one of the waiting-rooms above stairs, and, throwing back her hood, revealed a bright face, beaming with smiles. The welcome was sincere, and if not wholly disinterested, Angie was too conscious of popularity to be very critical as to motives. I've been waiting, Angie, to get you to tie this ribbon. Oh, Angie, I'm so worried with my back hair. Dear me, Angie, this curl sticks right out straight; couldn't you put this pin in for me, so that it would stay put, Angie?" Such were the appeals to her skill and good-nature that greeted her on every side, before she had time to throw off her own wrappings and take a look at herself in the mirror. A moment and a glimpse, however, sufficed for Angie. All was right with her own toilette, and her magic fingers were ready to

give the finishing touch to that of her companions. She could tie a knot, pin up a turban, or dress a head with flowers equal to any milliner, and could reduce a crooked pin, a bent comb, or a refractory curl to obedience, as easily as she could set a fashion, coax her father, or subdue a lover. So she passed from one to another, exercising her fairy gifts and receiving pay for her services in such little gratuities as — “That’s right, make it look just like yours! My, what a knack you’ve got! Oh, Angie, if I only had your faculty!” And now and then the whispered assurance — “Angie, you are a beauty and no mistake!”

This last was true enough. Not one of these New Jersey girls could compare with Angie; still, somehow they all felt happier and better-looking for her presence. She had the rare power of emitting pleasure while she absorbed admiration. Thus she was at once the belle of the district and the favourite of her own sex.

The secret of this double success lay partly in the fact that Nature had endowed Angevine Cousin with qualities to which her associates had no pretension, and so had placed her beyond rivalry.

Angie was not a native of New Jersey, but an exotic, and a rare one. Her mother, long since dead, was a New-England woman, of strict Puritan birth and training; but her father was a Frenchman, had passed most of his life in the atmosphere, if not the society, of the *ancien régime*, and maintained, even in his old age, something of the wit and the deportment of a true Parisian. Not that he boasted title or patrician blood. Far from it. He might have been secretary, steward, or more likely still, valet or courier, to the noble marquis whom he simply claimed to have *served*. What did it matter? He had the reputation of an upright man, and the manners of a gentleman — sufficient credentials certainly in a democratic country; at all events, they had served his turn.

Whether Angie’s character possessed the sterling virtues of her mother’s race as a background, experience had not yet

proved; but her exterior traits, personal accomplishments, all her superficial qualities, whether faults or graces, betrayed at once the paternal extraction. She had all that vivacity, good humour, and genius which the French comprehend under the general term *esprit*, and whoever escaped the attraction of her beauty, was sure to be captivated by her winning ways. Strictly speaking, Angie was not the handsomest girl of the neighbourhood. Farmer Rycker had a buxom daughter, a Hebe of freshness and bloom; and the justice of the peace from the neighbouring village (himself a bachelor), always brought with him to the tavern balls his favourite niece, a delicate miss, with as fair a complexion and regular features as a London doll. Even Polly Stein, herself a long-favoured girl, of an unhealthy pallor, could gratify her occasional spite against Angie, by insinuations upon her low forehead and brown skin.

What was it then in Angie which defied the lines of beauty and the spite of Polly Stein? Who shall tell what it was? It was that nameless something which exhales from the flower and glistens in the dew-drop, and feasts on the butterfly's wing. It was a complete individuality of character, which freshened the social atmosphere in which she lived; a play of feature so sparkling and so rapid as to make her face the immediate reflection of her thought; a harmony of motion which rendered every little action of her life a grace. Even the beauty of the other girls had in it a certain awkwardness and exaggeration. It had taken them by surprise, and they did not know what to do with it. But nature had endowed Angie by degrees, and made her perfect mistress of her own charms. There was nothing out of proportion in her face or figure, and her very attractions, whether innate or artificial, were so blended and toned down as never to offend the taste. Curls were the fashion of the day, and must be had at any labour or cost. Angie's cost her nothing. They were neither ringlets nor corkscrew curls; they were neither twisted up in papers at night, nor singed with hot tongs by day. The glossy black locks which a single stroke of the brush could straighten,

would be rolled into fashion again by the first breeze, or be massed in wavy folds by the moisture of the dew at nightfall. They could be likened to nothing but the soft drooping ears of the spaniel, and, thrown back from her forehead (Polly was right about her forehead, which was rather low), they formed the richest of coronets. The bright scarlet poppies and sprigs of golden wheat, with which she had adorned her head for the ball, peeped out from the luxuriant depths as if they had grown and ripened there, knew they were pretty, and felt at home. Angie was partial to scarlet, a colour which suited her brunette complexion. She liked to mingle it with her dark hair; and when her dress was white, as on the present evening, the strong contrast had the effect of heightening and intensifying her bloom. In accordance with this taste, she now wore a broad silken sash or scarf of this brilliant colour, enriched at each end by figures wrought in gold, and emblematic of some office or order — the insignia, perhaps, of the ancient marquis whom Mr. Cousin had served in his younger days. This showy bit of finery, a memento of his patron's grandeur, which Angie had found in an old trunk, and coaxed from her father for this very occasion, was sported over one shoulder and carelessly knotted beneath her arm, its long fringed ends floating off, and relieving the scantiness of dress, made extremely narrow, as was then the mode. Most girls would have been awed by the mere thought of thus shining in borrowed plumage; but Angie had the courage of a marchioness in the matter of dress, and confident that this stray patent of nobility produced a becoming effect, she wore her honours with as assured an air as if "to the manner born."

There was no lack of white dresses in the room; still Angie's was exceptional, both in material and style. The others were of cambric, with one or two coarse specimens of East Indian fabric; Angie's was a delicate muslin, wrought in sprigs at intervals and with a deep flounce wrought throughout.

"Oh," it may be said, "that is an invidious comparison!" One white dress is as becoming as another; besides, Angie's

is only an old relic — her maternal grandmother's wedding-gown, bleached up for the occasion. No matter for that; we are enumerating our heroine's marks of superiority, not tracing them to their source; so the dress must count. Besides, is it nothing to have come of respectable stock, and to have had a grandmother?

So much had nature and circumstances done for Angie. A motherless and petted child, she had grown up very much as the birds and the flowers grow; she had ripened without much interference or training from anybody. It is safe then to attribute to Nature most of the qualities which distinguished her. But Nature plays strange freaks — unaccountable ones, at least. What could be the reason that Angie — and many another girl for that matter, for it is a streak that runs in the blood of not a few of her sex — treated everybody well, except that person in the world who loved her best, and whom she in her heart loved best in return. Ever since Angie's mother died, and Mr. Cousin, yearning for a more genial climate than that of New England, bought the land next to farmer Rawle's, and brought his daughter, then six years old, to live in New Jersey, George Rawle had deified the child; and ever since that infant period, Angie had been a most tyrannical and capricious little goddess. Was it not enough that he had always been her ready champion and protector; that from the time when he led her by the hand to school, or climbed the highest trees and carved her name on the topmost branch, to the period of riper affection, when their voices had mingled in the Sunday choir, and the strength of his manhood had been hers to lean upon; that through all the days of boyish worship, youthful gallantry, and manly ardour he had still been her willing slave? Why need she put him to further test? Why must she vex him by her whims, and torture him with doubts of her love? Why must she now and then affect indifference to his presence, frown on his pretensions, and send him from her angry, that he might come back penitent? To every other friend she was equal in her cordiality. She had her own way with them all, but she won it by affectionate arts. She

teased and cajoled her father, she lorded it over the ancient negress, who otherwise ruled her father's house; but her wands of empire were wreathed with caresses and laughter. Geordie was more to her than all the rest, and she was all the world to Geordie; must she then make herself hateful to him that he might love her the more? O no — she was safe on that score. When she humbled Geordie, he always hated himself, poor fellow! — he never hated her.

But was it equally safe for Geordie? By no means. It may be doubted whether even the treachery of his uncle Stein was more undermining to the young man's strength of character. It unsettled him. It prevented him from applying himself steadily to any occupation at home. It robbed him of the energy to go abroad and seek some wider field of action. The period when he was under the ban of Angie's displeasure, real or imaginary, the hours succeeding those when he had been the victim of some unreasonable caprice on her part, were precisely the seasons when he was sure to come in the way of temptation, and prove powerless to resist it. The neighbourhood of Stein's Plains had — as what place on earth has not? — many a snare and pitfall for a youth whose natural ambition and spirit found no vent in steady purposes of usefulness. Had Angie reflected on the subject, she might have found increasing causes of complaint in the nature of George's pursuits and the dissipation of his time; she might have argued that true affection would never suffer him to linger in idleness, so long as poverty stood between him and the object of his love; but the same prudent line of argument would have suggested to her whether she had not the power to check him in a course of follies, or spur him on to nobler enterprises. As it was, though sensitive to his danger, she seldom took him to task on the highest grounds; and though piqued at his inefficiency in the art of earning a livelihood, she gave no consistent encouragement to his industry.

Fortunately for the continuance of their mutual relations, George had, until recently, been spared the pangs of rivalry. In the little sphere of their daily life, Angie was scarcely more

pre-eminent than himself. In a democratic country and a rural district, the social lines are not very distinctly drawn; and in circles where none bear marks of high polish, the rougher and finer grades of material may mingle without much grating. Still there are always prejudices, if not distinctions, of birth and blood, and George was, or at least Nature meant him to be, the best specimen of the best stock in the Jerseys. There were plenty of rough hands for work, broad backs for burdens, and stout limbs for patient endurance among the sons of the soil; but there was not such another handsome athlete as the widow Rawle's boy. It hardly seemed as if Nature could have meant his fine form to be bent over a plough, his acute senses to be narrowed down to the width of the furrow, his clarion voice to be exercised in the steering of oxen. At all events, *he* doubted their being bestowed for these purposes, and early evinced his preference for training a horse, carrying a gun, and making the woods ring with his halloo or his song. He simply followed his instincts, quite forgetting that God made the first man a farmer, and never made any man to be an idler. His instincts were destined to lead him into trouble, but that was not their apparent tendency. They brought him only pleasure and praise in the beginning. A daring boy, a capital shot, a glorious bass voice, will always have their admirers. Breaking vicious colts was not a very profitable business in those days, and had never been dreamed of as a profession; still it furnished exciting occupation, and was not without its reward, especially when a knot of rustics stood agape with astonishment, and Angie perhaps looked on, her little heart all in a flutter of fear, but nothing but triumph in her eyes. What satisfaction there was too in seeing her stroke the feathers of the wild ducks he brought to Mr. Cousin's kitchen, measuring the young sportsman and his gun with ill-concealed pride, while she said, "Poor things! How cruel in you to kill them, Geordie!"

"Oh, you go 'long," old Happy Boose would say on such occasions. "Massa George knows tender game fus sight, an'

has no massy; he aims right at the heart, an' hits. So you go 'long out o' my kitchen, both on yer. Ole Hap ain't a goin' to have no shootin' here — haw! haw! haw!"

That Angie should laugh and George blush at such an effusion on Happy's part, seems a reversal of the proprieties; nevertheless, such was usually the result of any reference to a sentiment which the weaker party trifled with, while it reduced the bold hunter to more than girlish helplessness.

The active nature of George's pursuits, the disinterestedness with which he lent himself to the service of others, might, and did for a long time, blind him to any deficiency in his plan of life. Strong, elastic, and profligate of his leisure, Nature and his neighbours furnished him with occupation through the week, and on Sunday the minister might almost as well have been dispensed with from the pulpit as George from the village choir. What wonder that, from the period of youth to that of manhood, young Rawle should, without vanity, believe himself indispensable to society, and forget what was due to his future prospects?

Such a career may continue for a while unchallenged and unblamed, but there comes a time when, if a youth is not alive to his own deficiencies, there is no lack either of advice or blame on the part of relatives and friends. It was now two or three years since George Rawle had reached such a crisis, and had allowed it to pass unimproved. His mother's querulous complaints had long ago given place to secret sighs and almost to despair; his uncle Stein's sly intimations had ripened into cutting sarcasm, and his uncle Baultie Rawle had ceased to expostulate, rebuke, or threaten; had turned his back upon his dead brother's son, steeled his heart against him, and even — so rumour said — forbidden him to cross his threshold.

Did George deserve all this? By no means. And yet the young man's best friends had not been without provocation and discouragement. Whether through his fault or otherwise, every attempt to give him a start in the world had ended in failure. There was a proposal, at one time, to send

him to New Hampshire to purchase cattle, and Baultie Rawle, who had an eye to the main chance and approved the project, was ready to advance sufficient capital; but, just as it was time to leave home, George, for some unaccountable reason, declined the commission and abandoned the enterprise. Not long after, there was a vacancy in the village store — the only one within three miles, and a thriving concern. The principal in the business cast his eye upon George; all the villagers sanctioned the choice; he had a good head for business and would make a popular salesman. Aunt Hannah Rawle engaged to do all her trading there; so did many of George's friends who lived at a distance, and had been accustomed to patronize other "grocery and general finding stores." The arrangement was thought to be satisfactorily completed, when suddenly the owner withdrew his partial overtures to George, pretended to doubt for awhile whether he should want an assistant, and ended by giving the appointment to Peter Stein.

George was mortified; the more so, because he had put a constraint upon his inclinations in ever consenting to accept the place. It was many months before any other opening offered itself for him, and he showed no disposition to seek employment. At length a proposition for building a certain corduroy road in Virginia was laid before the public. Baultie Rawle assumed a portion of the contract, and once more showed a willingness to put his nephew forward, though with less alacrity and cheerfulness than on former occasions. He appointed him overseer of the work, but made him subordinate to his uncle Stein, who had the purchasing of the oxen and tools, and the principal disbursing of funds. In the labour attending this enterprise, George endured great hardships, and endured them manfully, but got little credit for his efforts. His wagons were too old and light for the work, and either broke down or got set in the clayey soil; most of the oxen died of a contagious disease, and the speculation ended disastrously. Baultie, who was tight-fisted in money matters, and had latterly been distrustful of George, reproached him

with managing the business badly, and neglecting and abusing the cattle, and even went so far as to hint at his having possibly disposed of the latter for his own benefit. It was a singular coincidence that all Diedrich Stein's rickety farm-wagons disappeared from his place this year, and that the only yoke of oxen which he reserved for himself out of the large stock which he had disposed of to Baultie, died that season of the very disease which crippled and ruined the road-building teams; but those persons who knew the fact made light of it, and it did not even reach the ears of George. If it had, he would have been too proud, perhaps, to defend himself by casting aspersions on another; so he bore the blame, at the expense, it must be confessed, of his temper, and of all the love and respect he had once felt for his uncle Rawle.

George certainly had enemies among those who should have been his friends. It was not the less certain that the love of her who should have been his best friend might almost as well have been enmity as the mischief-working thing that it was. It was her unjust complaint of his willingness to leave her, and a quarrel that ensued, which caused him to relinquish his journey to New Hampshire. With her pride stung to the quick by his disappointment in regard to the clerkship in a country store, she let fall remarks so disparaging to this kind of labour as to confirm George's disgust for trade in all its branches. When he returned from Virginia after a three months' absence, she was so afraid he would know how glad she was to see him, that she feigned utter indifference, and so robbed him of the only reward he had counted on after his tedious absence. Add to this those numerous minor freaks which kept him always on the rack in regard to what would please and win her, and Angie might almost be included in the catalogue of those who had combined to ruin him.

It was after his return from his first, and what threatened to prove his last campaign in the field of usefulness, that George Rawle began to fall into condemnation, even in the eyes of well-wishers and the public generally. The occupa-

tions of his leisure hours had not always before been praiseworthy, nor his deportment blameless; still, on the whole, he had maintained his standing in life, and his good name in the neighbourhood. But it was when smarting under the injustice of Baultie, and disheartened by Angie's coldness, that he fell into bad company, then into debt, and finally into discredit. It was by the advice of the first, in order to retrieve the second, and in the desperation caused by the third of these evils, that he resolved to stake all his hopes upon the beautiful beast which now seemed his only friend. He would mate Nancy against his past ill-luck and lose or gain everything.

He lost!

There was but one thing wanting to complete his mortification and misery, and that, as we have seen, was at hand. Fate had kept her worst blow until the critical moment, and now stunned him with a rival. In George's estimation, the stranger's presence in the neighbourhood at all was an intrusion, his pretensions insufferable, the talk and gossip made about him ridiculous. That he should fall in love with Angie was a matter of course; had he been a king's son as well as an aristocrat, he could have done no less, so Geordie thought; but that she should encourage his addresses, was a thing he had not bargained for. There had never been a time when he could have endured this patiently, and now, when he was at a disadvantage every way, Angie's toleration of this showy stranger was gall and wormwood to him. The captain's presumption, in carelessly mating an inferior animal with his Nancy on the course, would have excited his ire under any circumstances. How intense, then, was his mortification and rage at his own accidental defeat and the unmerited victory of his antagonist! What wonder was it that, since success was so easy, the conceited coxcomb dared to step between him and his most sacred rights, thrust him aside as if he had been a worm, and bear away the best prize life could offer to any man? What wonder, since everything else had turned against him, that Angie had given her smiles to another, and with a look of scorn had annihilated him?

This last was a thunderbolt. The poor fellow was crushed by it — his better nature crowded down — the worst there was in him raging blindly. He was sure to rise again; there was power in him still for good or for evil; some angel influence, or some tempting demon, might yet inspire him to atoning efforts or to deeds of darkness. But for the present, he sat crouched on the hay in the dark stable, while his white-gloved rival stood at the foot of the stairs, waiting to lead Angie into the ball-room.

CHAPTER V.

The Christmas Ball.

THE kitchen was the ball-room, — not the outer kitchen, or pantry, where all day long Stein's wife had been spitting fowls, rolling out pie-crust, or anxiously thrusting her head into the mouth of the wide Dutch oven, — but the great inner kitchen, with its row of windows looking out on the stable-yard; its low smoke-stained ceiling, brick hearth, and quaint old clock, on whose forehead a ship under heavy sail was always pitching up and down on the waves of time.

The floor of this ball-room was not a spring-floor. The rafters on which it rested would have furnished timber enough for a modern house-raising, and the thickness of its planks had defied the tread of generations of feet, and the scrubbing of generations of hands. Here and there a hollow was worn in its surface, now and then a knot in the wood served to trip up the unwary; and the kitchen hearth, scarcely any two of whose bricks were on a level, obtruded into the very centre of the apartment. But these things were matters of indifference to the guests at Stein's ball. The fashion of the day encouraged them to spring high and clear obstacles. They were used to the inequalities of the ground, and, on the whole, like children coasting down hill, they rather enjoyed the jounces.

The band which furnished music for this ball was neither a Germanian orchestra, nor a city Brigade band; but old Cato Loo, yellow, wrinkled, and with his woolly head grey as

a chancellor's wig, played vigorously on the same violin which had served him as far back as the memory of the oldest inhabitant, and called the figures with a voice as loud and inspiring as a field-marshal's at a review. His sole assistant was an individual so wholly obscured by his instrument, — a violoncello, painted in resemblance of the national stars and stripes, — that he only merits mention by his *nom de guerre* of "The Star-spangled Banner," under which name he had been associated with Cato ever since the old man first aspired to the honours of an orchestral leader. If their music was not strictly scientific, it was lively, and within the appreciation of the audience; so that it is to be doubted whether the strains of Strauss and Weber were ever half so seductive to the loungers in modern anterooms as were the first notes of "Soldier's Joy," or "Money Musk," to the rustic crowd, who, huddled together above stairs, were impatiently awaiting the signal note from Cato's fiddle.

They poured in simultaneously, the bed-rooms yielding up at once their wholesale stock of matrons and girls, the men coming as flies come in summer, singly, from every crack and cranny in and about the house, and, like flies, clinging to the edges of the room, especially to the neighbourhood of the windows and doors, as if to secure some means of retreat. From these posts they shyly eyed the female portion of the company, who occupied the side of the kitchen next the blank wall, against which benches from the bar-room were placed for the accommodation of the elders, while the younger women stood awkwardly, or anxiously awaiting Cato's word of command, "Choose yer partners, gen'l'men!"

There were a few exceptions, however, to this general rule. Angie had the tact to loiter a moment at the foot of the stairs, the coquetry immediately to engross the captain, and the courage to enter the assembly-room leaning on his arm, at the very moment when their entrance was sure to command attention, and produce an effect. Meanwhile Mr. Cousin, whose sociability and courtesy were in complete contrast to the rustic embarrassment of his neighbours, moved

briskly about within the enemy's lines, — that is to say, in the female quarter, — making profuse inquiries concerning the health of the old people, complimenting the young girls, and regretting his inability to offer himself as everybody's partner in a dance. The little old gentleman looked so trim and courtly in his black small-clothes, worn almost thread-bare, but scrupulously preserved and brushed, and his voluminous neckcloth of stiffly-starched cambric, white as snow, that everybody was pleased and flattered by his attentions; the young girls blushed rosy red at his whispered praises, and wished the young men were half so "civil-like;" and one or two elderly spinsters, who were strangers to all forms of gallantry, felt a thrill of self-complacency in the belief that Mr. Cousin was making love — an elation of spirits which was, however, somewhat damped by the suspicion that possibly he had been drinking. Neither was the case, however; Mr. Cousin was merely a Frenchman, and in his native element — society.

There were one or two others among the company who ventured to overstep the restraints which the majority imposed upon themselves. Thus Squire Bunyan, justice of the peace, believed it incumbent on him to stand by his niece, who was very shy, until she got a partner; and farmer Rycker seized the first opportunity to put himself under his wife's protection, squeeze into a seat on the bench beside her, and watch to see who would "dance fust with our darters."

"This is purty consid'able of a ball, wife," said the farmer to his better-half; "nigh on to two dozen couple, I should judge, old folks and young folks included; — but Jarsey people will turn out when there's dancin' in the wind."

"And so they ought ter," said dame Rycker, "'specially when there's Christmas doin's, and they've got gals to look arter. Now, Susy," — and she gave a smart twitch at the gown of her youngest daughter, an awkward girl of not more than fifteen years, who was edging as close as possible to the maternal skirts, — "you hold yer head up smart, same as Phebe does; Joel Beck had his eye on you a minute ago — I

seen him. Jest look out smart now, an' you'll git asked — first set."

"Do see Angie Cousin!" exclaimed the bolder Phebe to two or three of her companions, "what a splurge she is making with Cap'n Josselyn! They've been parading all round the room, quite military-like — and now her tongue's going like a mill-clapper. Ma says mine's loose at both ends; but, law! if he should speak to me — he has such a knowing way with him — I should flutter like a scared hen."

"More fool you!" cried Polly Stein, thrusting her long neck in among the group of girls. "He's so entertaining, nobody that had any shine in 'em could help being bright that kept comp'ny with him."

"Law, you needn't talk, Polly!" retorted Phebe, who was smart enough in her own sphere; "I don't see but what your light's put out."

"Goodness me!" ejaculated Polly. "I ain't in any such dreadful hurry as to snap up folks before they're fairly in the room. I have plenty of chances to talk with the cap'n any day."

"One chance's enough to them that know how to make the most of it," answered Phebe. "Besides, the cap'n was taken with Angie from the first. He never set eyes on her until last Sunday, and then didn't he stare well at the singing seats!"

"There's others sits in the seats besides Angie," insinuated Polly, with a completely satisfied air.

"Oh, so there is!" replied Phebe. "I forgot the first treble." (Polly was this first, unpleasantly shrill, treble.) Phebe maliciously jogged the elbow of the girl nearest to her as she made her last remark, and continued, — "It was the second, and not the first treble, though, that the cap'n managed to walk home with between meetin's. He made a lot o' talk with the old gentleman, too, and managed to git invited to luncheon. Old Happy told our Joe that the reason she came so late to afternoon meetin' was, 'cause they had a real gentleman to take a piece with 'em, and had had uncommon fixin's on that account."

"Well! and what o' that?" cried Polly, in the shrillest

tone of her first treble. "He went up to look at the grape-vines, and talk to Mr. Cousin about raisin' 'em, same as they do in Europe, where the cap'n 's been on his travels. And twice since that he's been up in the afternoons to play some kind of a game with the old gentleman; and those are the only three times he's ever seen Angie Cousin, to my certain knowledge."

"Oh, he's been courting the old gentleman, has he?" inquired Phebe, facetiously, and again jogging her neighbour's elbow, — "then there's nothing to speak sharp or look jealous about, Polly. I 'spose it's on the old gentleman's account that the cap'n 's beaung Angie round now, and talking soft-sawder to her, and — why! sure as the world, they've taken places, and the dancing's going to begin! and —" here Phebe broke off short; all the girls faced round, anticipating a charge of partners; and when Phebe spoke again, it was to give a pleased affirmative to the salutation of a brisk young farmer, — "Phebe, they're a formin' — shall we jine in?"

"Who's goin' to lead off? Where's Geordie Rawle?" anxiously inquired Joel Beck. Dame Rycker had managed to push Susan forward at the right moment to secure the bashful Joel; Susan was a novice; Joel, at the best, could only, as he said, "foller," and the couple stood holding each other by the hand, but keeping as far apart as possible.

"Where's Geordie Rawle? We can't do without Geordie!" was echoed by the voices of several who had not until now missed the usual master-spirit of their festivities. There was no answer. Some shook their heads in doubt or ignorance; some referred sympathetically to George's disappointment in the afternoon; more than one glanced significantly at the handsome couple at the top of the set, and concluded that the stranger had slipped into Geordie's shoes. "It was as well Geordie wasn't there to see," &c.

"Where is Geordie?" echoed Angie's heart; and, half in a triumph which she could not help wishing he might witness, half in an anxiety which she could not wholly suppress, she

gave a quick glance at the right and left, looked over her shoulder with apparent carelessness, then, excited by chagrin at her lover's absence, gave her hand with animation to the captain, and they went down the dance in fine style. The other couples, thus reassured, fell easily into their places. The captain, though he declared he had never seen a Fisher's Hornpipe in his life before, caught the figure as if by magic, executed all the changes with grace and skill, and even encouraged and assisted others who had the advantage of him in practice. Thus he seized Susan Rycker's passive hands at the right moment, twirled her round like a top, and left her so prepared, by a few rapid instructions, for the part she was next to play, that the farmer and his wife, witnessing from their post of observation how successfully she and Joel went through the figures of — down the outside! — down the middle! — cast off, and right and left! chuckled with pleasure, and said to one another, "I don't see but our Susin goes it with the rest on 'em."

One of the ancient spinsters, before alluded to, Miss Sabrina Rycker, sister to the farmer, was only saved from a mortifying fall by the captain's adroit gallantry. Those were not days when any person, however advanced in years, was banished from the dance for other cause than lack of vigour; and this elderly miss, though frequently sneered at by her sister-in-law and nieces, could have maintained her ground with the youngest competitors, had she not been embarrassed by three tall ostrich feathers, which were mounted erect in her head, and which it required all her efforts to balance properly. She tripped, therefore, over Joel Beck's big boot. How the captain contrived to break her fall, nobody knew; but that she found herself restored to her feet before her younger rivals witnessed her discomfiture, was due to a promptness which at once won for the captain the goodwill of the most voluble tongue in the parish. Thus, before he reached the bottom of the dance, he had attained the summit of popularity; and this, too, in spite of the prejudice which might be supposed to exist against him on account of his

nationality, and the character he had so lately sustained on board an enemy's sloop-of-war. But then, to offset this, there was the pathos connected with his having been a prisoner, which appealed to the women's sympathies; the bravery indicated by the late sabre-cut on his arm, which both sexes could appreciate; and altogether, his position as a stranger and an exile, which called forth whatever chivalrous feeling there was in this rustic community. Had he conducted himself too loftily, this sentiment might have lain dormant, or given place to others of a reverse order. As it was, the condescension of his deportment on the present occasion excited it to the utmost, and exalted the young lieutenant in the enemy's service into a popular hero.

So Angie and he went down the dance in triumph, he courting favour along the female line, and Angie, on her part, dispensing pleasant words and smiles in the opposite ranks, and both at length reaching the pantry-door at the farther end of the kitchen, somewhat out of breath, but in high glee.

Here Mr. Cousin awaited them to offer the captain his snuff-box, — another indication of the stranger's facility in making conquests; not that it was difficult to win the favour of the Frenchman, or to overcome the national antipathy which might be supposed to be as strong, at least in his case, as in that of the people with whom England was actually at war, for never was man so open to friendship as Mr. Cousin; and as to prejudices, he was free from all prejudices but one, and that a general prejudice in favour of everybody. There had been no drawback, therefore, from the beginning, to the pleasure the old man took in the society of this aristocratic stranger, who, whatever he might be by birth, knew how to take a pinch of snuff with the air of a Parisian; at the same time tickling the ears of his French friend with the sound of his own name (always Anglicized by his rustic neighbours), but now given with the true French accent, and prefaced by the title "Monsieur."

Angie, meanwhile, manifested at once her good-breeding

and her good-nature by exchanging a few kind words with Dame Stein, who, having brushed up her person a little, but having, as usual, too much business on her hands to be presentable, clung to her pantry, only now and then peering into the kitchen ball-room to see the dancing, — a proceeding of which Polly, when she reached that neighbourhood, did not hesitate to express her disapprobation in the words, "Mother, don't! Why need you show yourself — looking so?"

The ball consisted wholly of country-dances, varied now and then by a rustic reel. But no modern invention of Terpsichore furnishes more variety, or calls for more vigorous effort than these same country-dances. They were therefore particularly well adapted to a population so accustomed to active labour that any recreation would have been tame which did not call their muscles into full play. To the captain only was this species of exercise a novelty; but he did not flinch. The chief motive for his exertions, indeed, was securing Angie for a partner. Still, although he danced with her so many times as to excite the remarks of the women and the envy of the men, he occasionally suffered himself to be satisfied with meeting her in the changes of the dance, or whispering adroit flatteries in her ear during the intervals. The reluctance which he felt, or feigned, to accept her proposition to introduce him to the other belles of the evening, was none the less flattering that he was at last over-persuaded; for while he stood faithfully opposite to Squire Runyan's niece, or farmer Rycker's Phebe, his dark, sparkling eyes were still pursuing Angie, and now and then catching a reponsive glance.

Whether Polly Stein took care to remind him of his engagement to dance with her, or whether he chanced to remember it, he at least saved his credit in this quarter by holding her to the agreement. It was a noticeable fact, — a proof, perhaps, of his quick appreciation of character, — that when conversing with Polly he dropped the strain of compliment and deference which was so gratifying to Angie's vanity, and,

as if adapting himself to a lower level, assumed a tone of familiarity and jest which he would not have ventured on with her. But then, perhaps, as the other girls said, and Polly intimated, it was because he was a member of the tavern household, and the landlord's daughter knew him so well.

At all events, it pleased and satisfied Polly. It did not prevent her owing Angie a grudge for engrossing so large a share of the captain's attention; but it prevented her believing that attention to be sincere on his part, and persuaded her that his relations with herself were, on the whole, more confidential.

As to Angie, she gave herself up to excitement and gratified vanity without remorse, or much regard to consequences. Here was an opportunity to exercise her inherent ambition for conquest, and punish Geordie for his past neglect. Was Geordie to be left to the supposition that he was the only man whom she was capable of bringing to her feet? Especially was he to be indulged in this belief at a time when, if ever, he had neglected her, been self-engrossed, irritable, and out of spirits? What right had any man to be depressed in the possession of her affections? No; it was enough that for half-a-dozen Christmas balls in succession she had been mated with a youth who seemed no nearer than ever to a position in which he could claim her hand. Lately, when she had seen him, he had been shamefaced and sullen. If he must be sulky in her presence, she would give him something to be sulky about.

So she reasoned with herself; but that her heart argued better than her head might be guessed from her penetrating review, now and then, of the entry, and other passages leading to the ball-room, and a slight start and quick glance of her eye whenever a tall shadow fell across the threshold of either doorway. In spite of herself, she was asking the same question which others have asked, and which it is time to answer, — "What has become of Geordie?"

CHAPTER VI.

Telling what had become of Geordie.

WHEN George Rawle lifted his head from his knees, in which posture he had been crouching he knew not how long, Nicholas Bly, the coarse man who had been with him on the tavern platform, stood at the entrance of the stall, and the light from a lantern which he carried in his hand shone directly in George's face. He had watched young Rawle, and followed him. George had heard some one enter the stable, and move about among the horses, ostensibly looking after their comfort, but in reality doing little but kick and growl at them. He thought he recognized Nick's voice, but did not consider his presence an intrusion so long as he kept at a distance from his retreat; he now looked up angrily, on finding himself discovered.

"Hollo, you young dog in the manger!" cried Nick, with feigned surprise, and speaking in the hail-fellow-well-met tone of a familiar comrade; "you've made your bed here, have yer? Wal, sence you don't seem to be enjoyin' it much, be gen'rous now, an' invite a friend to keep yer comp'ny!" And without waiting for encouragement, Nicholas threw himself heavily down beside George, propped his lantern up in the straw, filled a pipe with tobacco, and, having lit it by aid of the lantern, commenced smoking. George, meanwhile, remained obstinately silent, his attitude and face expressing a dogged resolution to ignore Nicholas' presence altogether. But the latter was not easily discouraged; assurance was his *forte*. "I say, Mr. George," said he, slyly keeping watch upon his companion's face, "things has gone agin' you like thunder, hasn't they?"

"Get out!" said George, with sullen vehemence. "What do you want to come here taunting a fellow for?" and, with a jerk of his shoulders, he half turned his back upon Nicholas, and rolling over on the straw, withdrew a little from his vicinity.

"Tauntin', old boy," responded Nicholas; "not I. I leave that for my betters. What should I be tauntin' fur? Let them crow that stands a-top o' the fence. Nick Bly's too low to be feared on that score. It's cause you're down in the mouth, Mr. George, that I feels as if you an' I were kind o' mates; misery loves company, yer know" — and Nicholas, leaning over the young man, who was resting on his elbow with his face hid from sight, laid his rough hand upon him coaxingly.

George shrank from his touch. A companionship founded on the basis of mutual and acknowledged degradation, had nothing very consolatory in it.

Nicholas took several whiffs at his pipe.

"Look ye here, youngster," he said at length, in the tone of one about to open an argument, "what's the use o' sulkin'? People an' things is dead set agin you, ain't they?"

George groaned.

"You don't like to own up to't — that's nat'ral; but lookers-on see most o' the game, an' I should say you was pooty well cornered, least ways will be, if you give up to't this 'ere fashion."

"What can a fellow do?" exclaimed George, bitterly; "once down everybody's ready to give you a kick."

"Why, up an' at 'em 's my motter," said Nicholas. "Fight it out, man, an' come by your rights, one way or t'other."

"I don't see as I have any rights in this world," muttered George. "Plenty of wrongs I've got o' late; if there's anything belonging to me yet that's worth having, I should like to know it."

"Natur' owes you a right for every wrong, man; an' if you take my advice, you'll have it out of her."

"Whip up Natur', as you call her, and drive to the devil, eh?" said George, with a cheerless laugh. "That's a race I've been running pretty fast lately, and a nag that'll soon

land me in the bottomless pit, I'm thinking, if I don't come to a stop."

"Don't you never pull up till you win the stakes, Mr. George; if you do, you ain't the boy I take yer fur."

"I don't know about there being any stakes to win; but one thing's certain, I haven't anything left to lose."

"That's jest it!" cried Nick, triumphantly. "That's where fortin's on your side now."

"That's a new way of looking at fortune," murmured George.

"The only true way I tell yer," replied Nick. "Why I owe all the luck I've had in life to taking that 'ere view o' the case."

"Great luck ever you've had!" exclaimed George, glancing with ill-concealed disgust at the greasy clothes and bloated face of his companion. George had not got used to low society yet.

"Why, not so bad nuther, considerin' my beginnin's," said Nicholas, meditatively, and pausing long enough to spit and knock the ashes out of his pipe. "Not but what I might ha' done better," he added, "if I'd had your chances."

"My chances?"

"Yes, yourn."

"Name 'em."

"Wal, respectable relations, an' eddication, an' friends as had money. Natur' owes more to folks that were born to expect somethin'. Now, I come up out o' the gutter, an' couldn't look beyond scratchin' in the mud all my days. But if I'd been you, I'd ha' aimed arter higher game."

George winced. Reproach from this quarter was unexpected, but it struck home. "You're right, Nick," said he, at length, "I had opportunities; it's my own fault, I suppose, that I have lost 'em."

"Lost 'em? not by a jug full!" retorted Nick, in a tone which betrayed how little he appreciated the nature of George's contrition. "By Jolly, if I was in your place now, yer'd soon see Nick Bly goin' it with flying colours."

"I only wish you were in my place!" exclaimed George, impatiently, "and that I was —" he could not add "in yours;" so, after pausing a second or two, he finished with, "nowhere."

Nick laughed — not heartily, as good men laugh at a good joke, but fiendishly — as devils laugh at their own wicked thoughts. After awhile, seeing that George had buried his face in the straw, trying perhaps to imagine himself the nonentity he craved to become, Nicholas began, as the serpent of old did, by trying to excite curiosity; and putting himself, as it were, in George's place, commenced throwing out mysterious hints of what he should propose to accomplish under his new conditions.

"Fust an' foremost," said he, "I wouldn't groan an' take on 'bout what was past an' couldn't be cured. Then I wouldn't lie down an' clutch at a straw when I might stand up with my hands full o' — well, we won't say what, but somethin' better worth havin' — an' I wouldn't let another feller come atween me an' my gal, when good looks an' smiles was easy bought; an' I wouldn't go afoot when I might jest as well ride, nor be shoved one side by wusser men, nor stand snubbin', nohow."

"What do you mean?" cried George, raising himself up suddenly, and speaking half in curiosity and half in anger.

"Law, nothin' oncivil, Mr. George; I was only a talkin' to myself an' a thinkin' out loud. P'rhaps you know best how to manage. I was only tryin' on your old shoes, an' thinkin' how easy I could cobble 'em up an' polish 'em like new."

"It's easy enough talking. I'd like to see you do it."

"Wal," said Nick, who, now that he had secured George's attention, was ready to state his proposition, "it's money that makes the mare go, ain't it?"

"Seems so," replied George. "I know some folks that are pretty well stuck for the want of it."

"Money's a long-handled whip," suggested Nick. "Give me money an' I'll drive everything afore me. Git your

pockets well lined, like the capn's yonder, an' yer'll ride inter favour on the gallop. Why he couldn't hold a candle to you, Mr. George, except that he's got the shiners. It gives him a kind of a glitter, 'specially in the eyes o' the gals."

Unflattering as this latter comment might be to the female sex, it made George acutely alive to the degradation of being a beggar.

"The thing's to get it!" he murmured, despairingly.

"That's it!" replied Nick, in an encouraging tone. "Once got, it's a nest-egg that's allers doublin'."

"Yes, but twice nought's nought," answered George, "and that's the beginning and end of my reckoning."

"'Twouldn't be if I was in your place," replied Nick. "Now, as I was tellin' yer, I never had much of a chance, an' what I did have is pretty well dreened out. But if I was George Rawle i'stead o' Nick Bly, I'd soon start a big figur' an' keep the ball a rollin'."

"Speak out," cried George, who was at once suspicious and impatient of his comrade. "What are you driving at?"

"A fortin', man, a fortin' ready made to yer hand. It's been keepin' for yer this many a year — snug as meat in a nut. Take my advice now, an' crack it."

"Where's the tree it grows on, I should like to know?"

"Up in the mountain, as I've hearn tell. Hain't yer got a rich uncle there that's been savin' up money fur yer like a careful old nuss?"

George's response was a laugh and an oath — the laugh against Nick for jumping so wide of the mark; the curse against his uncle, perhaps, or himself, or both.

"No! Devil take me then if I hain't been gummed!" exclaimed Nick, in genuine surprise. "So the old cove hain't got the ready, arter all?"

"What if he has?" said George, bitterly, "that's nothing to me."

"By Jove 'tis though!" retorted Nick, with as much zeal as if he himself were the heir expectant. "What's the reason 'tain't?"

"Do you suppose Baultie Rawle's going to throw his hard dollars away on a poor devil like me? not he. He'd bury 'em first."

"Bury 'em? Bury him! I say," growled Nick, brutally. "What does an old hulk like that want o' money?"

"Likes to look at it, and handle it, and count it, I suppose."

"The darned old miser! I'd soon make his reck'nin' come short, if I was you, Mr. George."

"What do you mean? 'Tain't so easy spending other folks' money, especially when they've turned you out of doors, and warned you that you shall never see a shilling of it."

George spoke this last phrase in the suppressed tone of one still writhing under the remembrance of past threats and abuse. Nick's quick apprehension, however, caught both the words and the spirit in which they were uttered.

"Turn'd yer off, has he? the vicious old skeleton! Then there's an end o' good manners atween yer. Perliteness has stood in many a man's way, so hang me if I don't think yer well rid on't. If yer elders don't set you no better example than that, why, they can't blame yer if you takes liberties as well."

"I take liberties with my uncle Baultie!" exclaimed George. "You don't know the man, Nick. His word's harder than most men's blows. Unless I've a mind to take liberties I should be sorry for, it stands me in hand to keep a safe distance from his iron tongue."

"Keep yer distance? Wal, so yer may. Old blood an' young's apt to run contrairy, but if I was you now, devil catch me if I'd be the hindermost. Ef I couldn't come up with him one way, I would t'other. You understand writin' pooty well, don't you, Mr. George?"

"You wouldn't have me write and ask for his pardon and his pocket-book!" ejaculated George, indignantly. "Not I. I may be a mark for bad luck, and as poor as a beggar, but I won't be a slave nor a jackass."

"Bully for you! You've got spunk, I see," cried Nick, slapping him on the back and chuckling. "I say as you do — no cringin'. But I'd make old Rawle shell out fur all that. I wouldn't talk *to* him, nor write *to* him nuther — but if I'd had eddication, and could handle a pen, I wouldn't mind writin' a word *fur* him — do you see? jest by way of obligin' folks all round."

George looked mystified.

Nick proceeded to enlighten him. Putting his mouth close to George's ear, and giving his elbow an expressive nudge, he whispered, —

"You can't take liberties with old Rawle *hissself*; but you might make free with his *name*."

Nick's meaning began to dawn upon George, who, shocked but still incredulous, had such an expression on his face, that Nick made haste to reply to it in the words, —

"Why, Mr. George, what a tarnation chicken you are! A reg'lar green un! You look fur all the world as ef I'd spoke o' boilin' up the old man an' sellin' his bones. I tell yer borryin' names is the commonest thing I know on. Fellers that's hard up don't make nothin' on't. Ef I was you now, and had an unnateral uncle, I'd scratch his name on a check an' hand it in to the bank he had dealin's with, an' pocket the cash, an' walk off a gentleman in no time."

"No, you wouldn't neither, you rascal!" cried George, raising himself on his elbow, and looking defiantly at Nick, who, having gone through with the pantomimic action of signing the note, presenting it, and receiving the money, had now plunged his hands into his pockets, and was complacently jingling a few copper coins.

"Why not, youngster?" asked Nick, coolly, indifferent to George's threatening attitude.

"Because," answered George, secretly triumphing in his own superior knowledge of his uncle's habits, "because my uncle Baultie has nothing to do with banks. So you couldn't come it over him that way. The only bank Baultie Rawle ever trusts in is his own strong-box."

Nick's countenance fell at first as George threw a damper on his scheme, but glowed with exultant eagerness as he caught the young man's last words.

"Strong-box, eh?" he murmured, drawing his hands slowly from his pockets. "Did ever you see that 'ere box, Mr. George?"

"Should think I had," said George, who having, as he thought, checkmated his braggart comrade, observed with satisfaction how crestfallen he looked at the veto put upon his scheme, but failed to catch the covetous after-glow, and so was thrown off his guard.

"And where does he keep it? Not up on the mountain?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"I want ter know. Now that's very onsafe, ain't it?"

"Unsafe? Why, no; he has it under his own eye by day, and stowed under his own bed by night. I don't know what better keeping he could trust it to."

"Did ever you get a peep into the inside on't?"

"Now and then — but not often. He keeps it pretty snug. I've seen it with the cover up when he was looking over his papers by the kitchen table, and once he gave me a gold guinea out of it to buy me a new hat, just after father died."

"Gold guineas! eh. Think there's many on 'em?" queried Nick, eagerly, and catching George by the sleeve.

The look and action were unmistakable. George glanced at him suspiciously, and evaded a direct answer by saying, "How should I know?"

"You ought ter know — an' I'll ventur' to say yer do, Mr. George; only you've caught his miserly tricks an' mean to keep dark. I'll warrant you've had yer hand into his pile many a time, an' helped yerself, hain't yer, now?" And Nick gave the young man an interrogatory shove.

"What do you mean by that?" cried George, repulsing Nick with an unceremonious force, that was almost a blow. "You know well enough the old man is tight as a drum. Do you suppose I've been in the habit of stealing?"

"Stealin' yer call it, do yer? Now I don't, though I know

there's some fools as does. I call it nothin' more 'n fair play. It 'll all be your'n one o' these days, or ought ter; an' if you hain't had gumption enough to help yerself when it come handy, why, then it shows you ain't up to snuff — that's all."

"Mine!" cried George, angrily. "Haven't I told you already my uncle had turned me off? Once, when I was a little shaver, he trusted me, and had reason to; now, when I am a scapegrace (for that's about what I suppose I am), he's disgraced me, twitted me, and called me a thief. I never deserved that last, — no, I never deserved that he should search my face, and all but search my pockets, for his gold. God knows there was little enough there! I never wronged him of a cent, but I call Heaven to witness how that old man has wronged me!"

George grew excited as he thus spoke. The deep sense of injury which had long been rankling in his bosom, now for the first time found vent in words. Bring a hidden sore to the light, and how astonishing is its spread and growth! Thought followed quick on thought, while the young man's unloosed tongue summed up the features of his case. Suddenly, as if stung by an adder in the straw, he sprang to his feet. Passion had given a new interpretation to the hint thrown out at random by Nicholas Bly.

"I knew he suspected me of being a robber and a liar!" exclaimed George, flinging back his head defiantly and clenching his fist, "but I never believed until this minute that he'd taken away my good name. Who put it into your head, Nick Bly, that George Rawle was used to playing the thief?"

Nick hesitated. He was not a skilled diplomatist, and his first impulse was to soothe George's wrath by the assurance that he had merely been throwing out a feeler; but a second thought suggested to his depraved mind that the heat and rage which lit up George's eye and paled his lips might be made useful tools, and must be sharpened rather than dulled. So he answered evasively, — "Don't get mad, Mr. George. I never more'n half believed it, or if I did, I didn't think none the wuss on yer."

"Then that's the story that's been going round," cried George, stamping his foot upon the straw as if to crush the stinging instruments of pain that now seemed to torture him in every member. "My character's gone, then — has been these many months, for what I know. Everybody has turned the cold shoulder on me of late, and it's my uncle Rawle that's at the bottom of it. I see it all now. Talk of thieves! It's he that's a thief. Yes, a grey old villain of a thief! — robbing me of my good name!"

"So he is," chimed in Nick. "That's jest what I say. I never had no 'pinion on him. A mean old scamp, that goes to prayer-meetin's an' sings psalms with the saints below, an' longs to be jined with them above, as I've hearn tell, an' yet plays the miser himself, an' accuses his own brother's son o' lyin' an' larceny."

"Don't talk to me!" cried George, authoritatively. "I can't bear it. Let me alone. I'm in a state o' mind when I might do an injury to somebody or other;" and turning his face towards the side of the stall, he pressed his hands to his temples and leaned his forehead against the rough planks.

"I don't blame you nuther," muttered Nick, who seemed to think it his business to personate justice and acquit George at every point. Then, in obedience to the youth's injunction, he maintained a short silence; but a deep groan from George having broken the spell, Nick again interposed. "Look ye here, Mr. Geordie, I tell yer now as I told yer in the beginnin', you've got to take a new tack or founder altogether. You're down, — yes, down as low as I be. It's that old man on the mountain that's tripped yer up, an' it's him that's bound to set yer on yer legs agin. You an' me are, both on us, at a discount in these parts; but the world's wide, an' there's plenty o' roads open to a feller. I'll show yer a way out o' all yer difficulties, an' get yer a passport to fortin', only;" — and here Nick approached George's ear, and whispered meaningly, — "that uncle o' yourn owes you sumthin' handsome, an' it's him that ought ter pay yer travelling expenses."

How much of this advice George heard or comprehended

it is impossible to say, for he neither moved nor answered. A considerable period of silence ensued between the two men. George still leaned against the planks, his face hid from sight. Nicholas stooped down, gathered a handful of straw, and stood gnawing at it. At length he might have been heard to say, in a sort of muttered soliloquy, — “I wouldn’t be tried an’ convicted for nothin’. Ef I was goin’ to get a smutty character, I’d get the valler of it too, I would! Might as well have a thing as not if yer have the name on’t!”

These and other such innuendoes he indulged in without interruption, coupling them with many an invective against George’s maligners, and profane hints of their merited fate in this world and the next. He had indulged in this sort of monologue so long without interference, that he started and shrank back frightened when George suddenly faced about and ejaculated fiercely, — “Hold your infernal tongue, you scoundrel! Must a man go to the devil because he’s been bid? or put up with Satan when he comes to him in human shape?”

“Satan’s yer best friend, if yer mean me,” suggested Nick, humbly.

George looked hard and searchingly at Nick, then said in a softened tone, — “You’re not quite a devil, Nick, for he is wholly false, and some things you’ve said to-night are true; I shan’t forget ’em.”

“Wal,” said Nick, “I b’lieve yer know yer man, an’ if you want me to help yer any time, I’m on hand — that’s all.”

“I may want you, Nick,” said George, in the tone of one who had half resolved on something desperate. “If I do I’ll let you know.”

“Where yer goin’ now?” questioned Nick, in surprise, for George was buttoning up his coat and looking round for his hat and whip, which he had dropped in the straw.

“Into the house. I’m goin’ to face ’em all.”

“What, jest as yer are?” and Nick, shabby as he was himself, glanced disparagingly at George’s muddy riding boots and rough home-spun clothes.

“Yes, just as I am,” replied George, surveying his own

disordered appearance with a stern complacency quite unlike his ordinary demeanour. "What do I care for any of 'em? — *any of 'em*, I say? Let 'em see me at my worst, and own up to what they think of me. I'll have it out fair and square before 'em all. I'm bound to know how far that old hypocrite has blasted an honest man's fame."

"Take a drop o' sumthin' fust," said Nick; and stooping down, he produced a common pint bottle from a hiding-place of his own in a corner of the stall. The offer was made in kindness, or what Nick meant for such, for Geordie looked deathly pale, and his tightly-set lips, glaring eyes, and expression of intense determination were in strange contrast to the genial smiling features which were usually the credentials of his easy good temper.

The offer was well meant; but it was anything but a friendly offer, especially under circumstances like the present.

Geordie stared at the rum-bottle an instant in an absent way, then grasped it and drained a deep draught.

CHAPTER VII.

In which a Sudden Stop is put to the Music.

It had been the custom ever since Diedrich Stein instituted Christmas balls for the benefit of the public generally, and the public-house particularly, to serve the supper in a half-finished chamber above the wood shed, a sort of drying-room, the walls of which, at different seasons, were festooned with ears of seed-corn, bunches of herbs, strings of dried apples and pumpkin, or linen clothes fresh from the wash-tub. Here Polly Stein had occasionally been known to give an entertainment to the young people of the neighbourhood, in the thrifty shape of a corn-husking or a quilting bee, on which occasions the labour and the excitement attending it were made to supersede the more substantial good cheer that might have been expected elsewhere, but which the Steins never gave anybody gratis.

On Christmas-eve, however, when the supper was understood to be paid for at so much a head, there was no lack of creature comforts. True, the viands were arranged without much regard to taste or uniformity, and the city exquisite would have been sadly shocked at the incongruities of the table. Ham, well dressed, is always genteel; and no one despises stuffed fowls; but, just think of it! the former was flanked by home-made cheese and pickled beets, and the latter by crockery pitchers, filled with hard cider. Dame Stein's pastry, though, to use her own words, "lard was the shortenin' she depended on mostly," was well baked and flaky, but then the idea of mince and squash pies, ready cut in quarters, and applesauce *ad libitum*! Who ever heard either of custard puddings, pears stewed in molasses, and bowls of cracked walnuts promiscuously intermingled with dishes of soused pig's feet, baked beans, or sour-kroust? Yet you might have attacked the table at almost any point, and taken your choice of all these eatables. Any other drink than cider you would have missed from this department, because you had a standing invitation to take "that sort of thing" at the bar, and pay extra.

You (and by *you* I mean the exquisite of that age or this) might have found still greater fault with Stein's supper-room on another score. There was no fireplace, and in ordinary Christmas weather it was cold there, fearfully cold. On the night of December twenty-third, 1812, you could see your own breath, and your neighbour's — everybody's breath — steaming away like so many teakettles — after dancing too! Why, really, it would be as much as your life was worth to venture in. Not so with the Stein's Plain folks! Their lives were worth more than yours or mine; at least, they could stand more wear and tear. They were used to frosty nights and rooms without fires. It would be a poor story if eating and drinking couldn't keep them warm enough; and as to the young people who had been exercising until the girls' faces were of a uniform redness and moisture, and until the youths of the other sex chafed within the confinement of their best

coats, they always depended on cooling off at supper-time, preparatory to beginning again. Catch cold, indeed! It would be a miserable tool who couldn't endure the atmosphere of Stein's supper-room from half-past eight to nine. (As the ball had commenced at six, that was not an unreasonably early hour for supper.) Why, it was no colder than any of the rooms in their own houses, unless perhaps the kitchen. The school-house, where, in the winter months, they had all acquired the rudiments of learning, was only warmed by the feeble stimulus of study. The meeting-house, which had been shut up all the week, was inconceivably chilly on Sundays, its only artificial heat being what chanced to be contained in the minister's sermon. It would be strange enough, if, with their systems overcharged with caloric, the Stein's Plains folks did otherwise than welcome a breath of fresh air.

It may be supposed, therefore, that they were moved to astonishment and compassion when, on the company's being ushered into the supper-room, the English stranger shivered, buttoned up that military coat of his, and looked in vain, first over one shoulder and then the other, to see if he could detect some snug retreat or sheltered corner in which he could ensconce himself and his partner — the latter, of course, being Angie, as he had early in the evening engaged to escort her to supper.

"What a barn of a place this is, Miss Cousin!" he exclaimed; "these people are barbarians! Why, this exposure will be the death of you! — or of me, at least," — was the still more urgent thought which expressed itself in another shiver.

"Yes, it is wretchedly cold!" responded Angie, who would not have thought about it otherwise; but who, seeing her genteel escort so horrified at the atmosphere, very naturally gave a genteel shiver too.

"Let me bring you a cloak! Dear me! these farmers and milkmaids may be able to endure it, but you, Miss Cousin, *you* are more delicately constituted. I cannot suffer you to

inhale this arctic air; you would be ill, and I should never forgive myself. Let me bring you a wrap of some kind."

Angie assured him that his fears were groundless. She should not take cold — at least, she did not *think* she should. It had never occurred to her before, that a frail constitution was a mark of refinement; but now, there was something so flattering in the distinction made between her and her companions, that she voluntarily moved from the vicinity of a window, and though she declined the cloak, suffered the captain to untie the silken scarf which was fastened at her waist, and tenderly fold it around her bare neck and shoulders.

He then approached the table with the view of securing places for himself and Angie upon one of the rough benches that surrounded it; but, although there was a general disposition to exercise politeness towards him, which manifested itself by several voices exclaiming in a breath, "Room here, cap'n! plenty o' room here!" he declined every offer of accommodation, and stepped back at length to report to Angie, that those country cubs were crowding and pushing to such a degree, that he could not think of exposing her to their rudeness. "And if I could, Miss Cousin," he added, "there is nothing there with which I could hope to tempt you; not that I wish to disparage my landlady's cooking — no, upon my word. I have no doubt that many a starving man might be made joyful around that board; but a gentleman must be hungry indeed, much more a lady, who could stand such a spectacle as that yonder. Why, there is an old fellow there," whispered the captain, confidentially, "cutting up a turkey much in the style in which he would chop wood, and a young woman munching ham and gingerbread at one mouthful — pah! Miss Cousin, I will not disgust you by any further particulars. I know you are very amiable — so am I; but there are limits to toleration;" and he laughed a meaning laugh, which seemed to say, "We will bear with these people good-naturedly, but cannot be quite blind to their vulgarity, you know."

Angie joined mechanically in this laugh of derision. She would not have hurt her neighbours' feelings openly for the world, but she could not resist a glow of satisfaction at the contrast which the captain must see between her manners and those of her country friends, to make him so confidential in his criticisms. Besides, there did seem something gross to her to-night in the way the people were eating. The conflict between pique and vanity, which was waging in her own breast, had quite robbed her of her usually healthy appetite.

"You have put yourself under my charge, Miss Cousin," continued the captain, "so now let me cater for you. Let us beat a retreat to the little sitting-room below. There is a delicious bed of coals on the hearth. I will persuade Stein to bring us a cold fowl, some biscuits, and a bottle of Madeira. That will be luxury; I shall be made happy in the only society I crave this evening; and you, — Oh, you will be generous, and bear with me — if not for charity's sake, for the sake of the charming little supper I will arrange for you there. Come!" and he held out his hand in a lively way that was quite irresistible.

It seemed rather invidious to leave the rest of the company; but, on the other hand, there was something tempting in the thought of such a select and exclusive arrangement. Then it is so easy for a man of the world to flatter a rustic coquette into taking airs. So Angie entered into the spirit of the proposal, and in a few minutes she and the captain were seated in front of the sitting-room fire, with a little table between them, while Stein, who had stayed below to tend the bar, was, in compliance with Captain Josselyn's suggestions, bringing choice little instalments from Dame Stein's private larder, and hinting his congratulations to Angie upon her privileged lot.

The captain certainly fulfilled his promise to provide a choice little repast. He carved the fowl in the most dainty fashion, dressed a few raw oysters in the shell, cut delicate slices from the roll, uncorked the wine himself, that no less skilful hands might disturb the dregs, and so gratified

Angie's naturally fastidious taste by the dexterous manner in which he served and presented the refreshment, that to her own surprise her appetite revived, and she found herself making an excellent meal, and even sipping now and then the amber wine which the gallant captain recommended as an antidote to the cold.

"If you will excuse me for a moment, Miss Cousin," said he, when the compliments of the table were at an end, "I will bring my guitar and sing you the little Spanish song I spoke of the other day."

Angie expressed the most naïve delight at the proposition. The captain ran upstairs to his room, and in a moment reappeared with the instrument. It was a love song which he now proceeded to sing. The words were unintelligible to Angie, but the action was vehement and passionate, and the singer contrived to throw so much meaning into his voice, gestures, and expression, that Angie felt herself tremble and blush beneath the searching dark eye, which somehow she could neither meet nor escape, and which exercised a sort of magnetic effect upon her will.

We have hitherto spoken of the captain as a young man, but he was not so very young after all. A smooth complexion, jet-black hair and eyebrows, slight figure, and quick mercurial temperament, imparted to him a youthful air; but on closer observation, it was easy to detect those sharp lines about the temples, that slight hollowness of the eyes, and, still more, that assurance of manner which indicate a ripened experience.

As Angie sat opposite to him, the object of his fascinations and gallantry, she felt the advantage he had over her in this as in other respects. She realized that he had confidence and courage; the former in view of his social position, the latter, of his superior years. These were traits Angie had never yet contended with in a lover, and they made her yielding, timid, child-like. So she sat listening like a charmed bird.

Meanwhile, a farm wagon rattled up to the door; there

were heavy footsteps in the principal entry, there were shadows passing and repassing the windows. This was not an evening when one could look for much privacy in the sitting-room of Stein's tavern, opening, as it did, both on the main entrance and kitchen. Still, a public-house is every man's castle. If Angie and the captain had that claim to the sitting-room which belongs to first occupants, strollers on the platform outside, or loungers in the entry, had none the less the right to peep in at the windows, or listen to the music. One party, however, could scarcely be justified in interrupting the other, and it was therefore a barefaced intrusion, as well as an insult, when a tall figure which had for a few moments darkened one of the windows, stalked suddenly into the room, walked directly up to the little refreshment table, brought down his fist upon it with a thump which set all the crockery to rattling, and in a voice of wrath exclaimed, "Stop that!"

The music stopped. Angie sprang up, and stood opposite Geordie, angry, bewildered, mortified. She did not speak; but the captain, coolly retaining his seat, and suffering his white hands to toy with the guitar strings, said — "Really!"

"Yes; stop it, I say!" continued Geordie, fiercely; "I want to speak to Angie Cousin."

"Ah! some friend of yours, Miss Angie?" queried the captain, surveying George with undisguised contempt. "If so, I am dumb." And he waved his hand, as if foregoing any right to take offence in consideration of its being Angie's affair, and a matter quite beneath his own notice. "Go on with your business, young man," he added, with a patronizing air; and quietly laying down his guitar, the captain took the attitude of one willing to wait the pleasure of the other two, in consideration of the amusement he was likely to derive from the rustic scene.

If the man of the world despised the country youth, the sentiment was mutual. George surveyed the captain from head to foot, as a man might look at a monkey. "You keep

clear of this, now; that's your safest plan!" he said, by way of a warning; then, turning his back on the stranger, he came between him and Angie, and faced her angrily.

She was angry too. Her pride was irritated at George's behaviour, the whole responsibility of which the captain had thrown upon her. Before he could speak, accusingly or otherwise, she, as usual, took the offensive, saying, "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Geordie?"

"You are ashamed of me, Angie; I've seen that plain enough this long while."

"And no wonder!"

"Oh, no indeed! no wonder at all," was the sarcastic rejoinder; "you've kept such grand company of late, it's quite time you should have done with old friends."

"Old or new, I shall choose what company pleases me, you may depend upon it."

"Of course you will."

"And that won't be yours, George Rawle, unless," she added by way of qualification, "unless you should become a very different man from what you are now."

"And what am I? That's the very thing I've come here to know," said George, defiantly. "Speak out; what am I?"

"You're a rude, unmannerly fellow."

"Is that all? Go on."

"All! no. I can't tell you what you are. I don't know what you are, nor care. I wish you'd go away;" and Angie, worried and vexed, glanced anxiously in the direction of the captain. He was leaning against the mantel-piece, smiling, and picking his teeth (the last not a very elegant act for one of his breeding, a hint perhaps at his estimation of the company he was in).

The captain's coolness and George's persistency exasperated Angie. She was determined to vindicate herself in the eyes of the former from any complicity in the misconduct of her country lover. "You shan't stand there questioning me," she said, accompanying her words with a positive

motion of the head. "I won't bear it, Geordie; do you hear me?"

She might well ask this last query, for either he was deaf, or, what was equally incredible, had no intention to obey her. With arms folded, he stood obstinate and determined. She turned away from him, but he again planted himself before her. She stopped short and frowned.

"It's of no use, Angie," he said. "I won't go till you have answered my question."

"What question?"

"You *shall* tell me what you think of me; what they all think. I have a right to know, and I will."

"Is the young man's character in jeopardy?" asked the captain, in mock anxiety.

The question and the manner were so ludicrous, that Angie, though provoked at their sarcasm, could not resist a smile.

The blood rushed into George's face, as he saw himself the object of ridicule. Perhaps the spirit he had drunk, too, was getting into his head, for his eye grew wild and restless, and his tone was increasingly vehement, as he exclaimed, — "Oh, it is sport to you, is it, to see a poor fellow driven to the wall? Angie," — and he grasped her arm, — "listen to me one minute, and tell me the truth, if you have one grain of pity left for an old friend. Everybody has slighted me lately; not you only, but everybody. What is the reason?"

He was terribly in earnest. Angie felt it, and would either have expostulated with him, or answered seriously, but for a diversion given to her feelings by a jeering suggestion from the captain, that the reason, seemed palpable.

At this intimation she stopped short, looked distrustfully at George, and withdrew from his touch.

"You let us two alone, *will you?*" said George, turning upon the captain, and tightly grasping the handle of his whip.

"Certainly," was the prompt response. "I am at Miss

Angie's bidding; she has but to say the word, and I forbear to disturb the harmony that seems to exist between you." And as the captain stooped to pick up a bit of the golden wheat which had fallen from Angie's hair, he caught her eye, and the smile on his face was full of irony.

It was an even chance that minute whether poor Angie should laugh or cry. She had never felt so babyish and miserable; but, on the other hand, her pride had never before been so stung. Nature craved the relief of tears, but with the consciousness of the captain's eye upon her she resolved not to make a fool of herself, and so forced a laugh, — and a most hollow unnatural laugh it was.

The captain caressed the bit of wheat, and turned his face to the fire, ostensibly to conceal his disposition to mirth.

And Geordie! They had much better have struck him, especially Angie. The smart of the blow might have been soothed long before the recollection of that mocking laugh could be effaced. The remembrance of it was to rankle deep in Geordie's soul, and in Angie's own soul deeper yet.

He was reckless enough before, he was maddened now. He was not intoxicated — at least, not until that instant. The captain's insinuation had wronged him. It was true he had eaten nothing since morning, and, following upon his long fast, the draught he had taken from Nick Bly's bottle had doubtless helped to excite his brain. Still he had hitherto been master of his words and acts; now he was the victim of rage, shame, and injured love, rather than of alcohol.

"It has come to this, has it?" he cried. "You are making game of me — you and that puppy!" and his glance shot rapidly from Angie to the captain, then fixed itself on her. "You give yourself up to him, do you, and let me go to — hell?" And coming close to her, he whispered the last word hoarsely in her ear.

Angie was frightened: she uttered a slight exclamation of horror, and looked up in George's face with an anxious, bewildered expression.

Perhaps there was a shade of sympathy in this upturned look which emboldened the youth, for he now caught her hand. "You have to choose between us two, Angie," he hoarsely ejaculated, "for it's now or never."

"Come, come, young man, enough of that," interrupted the captain, starting forward with impudent confidence in his right to act as umpire, and break up this scene the moment the "young man," as he termed him, appeared to be going too far; and drawing Angie's arm through his, he led her a few steps towards the door, saying, in a protecting tone intended to reassure her, "Let me take you under my wing; see, the musicians have returned from their supper, — we will forget this vulgar *contretemps* in a lively reel."

But he was not destined to bear away his partner so easily. George sprang forward, caught Angie's disengaged hand, and contended for the possession.

"Let go that lady's hand," cried the captain, imperatively.

"For Heaven's sake don't leave me so, Angie," implored George.

Angie looked helplessly from one to the other. The contest had brought them all to the door opening upon the entry, and opposite to the bar-room.

"Hands off, you scoundrel!" persisted the captain, "or I'll call for help."

George's only answer was a muttered oath and his horse-whip raised in the air.

Angie screamed, struggled to escape from them both, and looked around her as if in the hope of some timely interference. Her look and cry were responded to instantly, but in the last way she could ever have dreamed of.

An old man, very old, came out of the bar-room. With an eye full of rebuke, and a hand raised in solemn warning, he faced the disreputable scene, and said, in a voice of authority, "Young men, stand back; let go the gal! Is that the way to treat a woman?"

They all retreated a step or two within the sitting-room.

George dropped Angie's hand involuntarily; the captain would have retained her arm within his, but she proudly withdrew it, though maintaining her place close at his side.

The white-headed veteran, whose puritanic dress and severe demeanour were calculated to inspire respect, if not fear, looked gravely from the, to him, unwonted sight of a couple attired in ball-room costume to the equally unfamiliar aspect of the country-bred youth, who, with his jockey riding-jacket, mud-splashed boots and trowsers, flushed face, matted hair, and horsewhip still vibrating in his hand, was a yet more indecorous object in the eyes of the stern old man.

"George Rawle," he said at length, fixing his eye on Geordie, and speaking syllable by syllable, "is that you?"

George hung down his head and made no answer. The unexpected apparition of his uncle Baltimore Rawle seemed to have paralyzed him.

"Boy," said the old man, after a pause that was heavy with meaning, "you are a disgrace to your ancestors!"

George looked up hastily. There was an instantaneous flash of his eye, which was the next minute cast down as before. Accustomed from earliest boyhood to hold this venerable member of his family in the utmost awe, he might hate or curse him behind his back, but he could not defy his presence.

"It is well your father never lived to see this day," continued the old man; "never lived to have his grey hairs brought down with sorrow to the grave by an unworthy son. I pity your poor mother."

The hand which held the whip trembled at these words; perhaps with rage, perhaps with shame; possibly from some more heart-stirring emotion.

Baultie Rawle now turned to Angie, with, "What is your name, young woman?"

"Angevine Cousin," she answered, humbly.

"I can't speak that; but no matter. You've kept company some with him of late, miss?" and he pointed to his nephew.

Angie, still humbly, signified a sort of assent. The captain laughed. Was nothing serious in that man's eyes?

"And you've dismissed him" (the old man judged this from the attitude of the parties in the scene he had just witnessed); "you've done right, miss; and let me tell you — me, his uncle, — that you're well rid of him."

Perhaps Angie was not so convinced of this. At all events at this crisis she moved a step further from the captain, a step nearer to Geordie.

"And you, Mr. Military-man," said old Rawle, addressing the captain, and taking a somewhat curious survey of his person, "you're a stranger, I reckon, in these parts. If so, let me give you a piece of wholesome advice. Quarrelling and bandying words is always disgraceful, especially when there's a woman consarned, and I warn you, as a friend, that the young man I just caught you wrangling with, though he's come of good stock, is a rotten bough. Everybody knows him for an idler; it is easy enough this minute to see 'drunkard' written on his face, and if you will take an honest man's word for it, he is little short of a thief. Such society is corrupting. His own relations are ashamed of him, and I, his father's brother, and the head of his family, think it a solemn duty to put strangers on their guard against him, as I would against any other nuisance."

"Thank you, sir," said the captain, with a mock gravity, which the old man, in his simplicity, took for gratitude. "I'll take your advice." As he spoke and bowed, he dropped his bit of wheat and stooped to reclaim it; but Angie, too quick for him, snatched it from the floor, and holding it fast, drew still nearer to Geordie. It almost looked like going over to his side.

Until now Geordie had not changed his position, had only once raised his head; but to be thus publicly traduced and held up to scorn was more than he could bear. He set his teeth, clenched his fist, and advanced a step towards Baultie, with — "You lie, old man — by Heaven, you lie! To suspect your own nephew's honest character is false enough, and

mean enough, without branding him to the world as a villain!"

Baltimore Rawle was a stern, uncompromising man, accustomed to exact obedience and enforce discipline. That George should venture to accuse and defy him was adding sacrilege to sin.

"Back!" he exclaimed, as he would have to a dog. "Back, boy, and be silent!" and, as if to enforce his words, he repelled George with his arm, and compelled him to retreat, until he stood with his back braced against the wall.

Angie crept close to him. He burned with wrath — so did she. That she should slight or ill-use him herself was one thing, but that anybody else should defame him was quite another. At this moment the two made common cause.

"Stand there, George Rawle," continued the old man, imperatively, "and listen to what I have to say. I call Heaven to witness!" and he raised his hand, as one does in taking an oath — "and you, Mr. Military-man," to the captain, "and you too, Diedrich Stein," to Stein, who, with eager lips apart, had first stolen into the entry, and then into the room, and so had heard and seen all; "and —" he was going to include Angie, but something in her look forbade him, so he summed up his audience with — "I call *all* of you to witness that this ungrateful boy has this night insulted and given the lie to his old uncle — that he deserves my curse, and shall have it."

Then turning again towards George, he went on thus: "If you'd grown up the honest, peaceable lad you gave promise of, the fruits of fourscore year of industry might all ha' been yourn, and with 'em a blessing. But now, go where you will, and live as you will, you son of iniquity! Wrangle, riot, and be drunken; spend other men's money, and wallow in your own sin; but remember that you carry with you all your life the legacy of an old man's curse, and that after death he will be a witness against you at Heaven's bar. Now begone, and don't let me ever see your face again in this world."

Blinded with passion, and pale with rage, Georgie stood and heard his uncle out, then slowly raised his clenched fist, but met the unflinching eye of the old man; and his resolution failing him, the hand dropped as if palsied. He then glanced vacantly at the faces around him, but made no movement to depart. A sly gleam of satisfaction shot through the decent veil of regret which Diedrich Stein's countenance was wearing.

The captain's features manifested weariness and disgust of the whole scene. Angie's face alone expressed real sympathy for either party. The blood had mounted to her temples, and her eye absolutely glared with anger, as she followed every look and word of Baultie Rawle.

"Take yourself off now, boy!" he said, seeing that George still hesitated. "Your uncle Stein will give you no harbour here—not if he is his own friend or mine;" and Baultie waved his hand in the direction of the door.

Stein, with his usual servility, muttered something about being sorry to turn a relation out of doors, but that Baultie was the best judge of what was right.

George stood a minute more, a prey to passions so conflicting as to render him torpid; then, with a start which seemed to impart an electric shock to everybody present, he rushed out of the room and the house, dashed through the line of light which radiated from the tavern windows, and was lost in the darkness beyond.

Forgetting everything but her own dreadful anxiety, Angie pressed her face against the window-pane and saw him depart—saw more than she had dreamed of seeing, or was likely soon to forget; for, as he shot past the bar-room door, he had sufficient time and presence of mind to make a signal to a man who had been waiting for him there,—the same shabby, bloated man, with the sore finger and greedy eye whom Angie had seen in his company when she alighted from her father's carryall that evening; she also saw the man, in response to the signal, come out of the tavern and follow in

the direction George had taken, — and the man was Nicholas Bly.

“Voilà!” at this instant exclaimed Mr. Cousin, presenting himself in the doorway. “Ah, Monsieur Capitaine! I’ve found you at last. You are a man of much resource. Ma foi! you would make one boulevard de Paris out of de leetle parlor of Monsieur Stein;” and the old Frenchman glanced at the *tête-à-tête* table at which the captain and Angie had been supping, and rubbed his hands in high glee. “Eh bien!” he continued in a different tone, as, taking a second survey of the group on whom he had intruded, he detected the discordance between his own humour and theirs. “You are not one party of pleasure, I tink. Monsieur Rawle,” and turning to the old man in whose rigid face and figure the quick instincts of Mr. Cousin detected the kill-joy of the occasion, “I did not ’ave expect to see you here. I hope you ’ave ver’ good health;” and bowing respectfully, Mr. Cousin stepped up to shake hands with his aged fellow-townsmen.

“I am here by accident, sir,” answered Baultie, with emphasis, and taking no notice whatever of the offered hand. “My wagon trace gave out a few rods yonder, else you may depend upon it I would never have made myself a witness to such sinful fandangoes as that;” and he pointed an abhorrent finger at the dancers, now returning in a hurry from supper, and making a noisy rush into their ball-room. “Such spectacles are risky for young men, but for old men they are *scandalous*. Have they put my horse to, Stein? If so, the sooner I’m on the road the better.”

Stein started to make the necessary inquiry, and the iron old man followed him without bidding any one good-night.

The Frenchman, rebuked and crest-fallen, shrugged his shoulders and drew near the fire, as if he felt a chill creeping over him.

“Take a hand at piquet, sir, and a glass of wine?” suggested the captain, with an air of perfect unconcern. “Bring another glass, Stein, and a pack of cards,” he called over his

shoulder to the retreating landlord; at the same time seating himself at the table, and drawing a chair up opposite to him for Mr. Cousin.

The latter did not take it at once, but stood with his back to the fire, warming himself.

"You will catch one cold at dat window, ma chère," he said to Angie, who seemed to be looking out at the night. "Beside, if that big ogre man see you dere when he come to drive away, he will give you one look to kill."

"I'm not cold, papa," said Angy, with difficulty commanding her voice, for the poor girl was crying.

The captain prudently forbore to add his expostulations.

Stein now came hurrying back with the wine-glass and cards. "None of the cleanest, cap'n," he said apologetically to his guest, as he handed him the pack; "but I believe there's the right number. Real Madary, twenty year old — cap'n's own private stock!" he whispered to Mr. Cousin, as he filled the glass for him. The captain, slightly wincing, shuffled the dirty cards. Mr. Cousin sipped his wine, smacked his lips, and declared himself "bien content." They began to play.

For ten or fifteen minutes the silence of the little sitting-room was only broken by the noise from the adjacent kitchen, and such ejaculations as — "Point!" "Sequence!" or, "Your play, sir!"

"Will we make one more adventure?" asked Mr. Cousin, as the game terminated in the captain's favour.

"Certainly," replied the obliging antagonist; "that is, unless Miss Cousin will honour me with her hand for another dance?" and he looked inquiringly at Angie.

"Me? O no," answered Angie, slightly turning her head. "I'd rather not dance any more." Then wiping away the few tears she had shed, and smothering the many that were unwept, she ventured to approach her father, and say, "I am tired, papa, I want to go home."

"Eh bien, ma chère, I am ver' content," responded the

ever-complacent little Frenchman. "We shall go home. You 'ave dance much. I 'ave some fatigue also, and dat small Jehu dat is waiting to drive the equipage, I 'ave pity for that *garçon*. He will be sleeping on some chair. I shall go this minute to find him. Yes, yes, ma chère, it is ver' good resolve; we shall go home."

The pleasure-loving little Frenchman lingered one moment, however, at the fire, — just long enough to replenish his glass, and, while pledging his entertainer, long enough to give Angie the chance she desired, to slip away, with only a hasty good-night to Captain Josselyn.

The captain loitered some time in the entry-way, with the intention of escorting her to the equipage, which was not long in coming round to the door. But any girl who knows how to win attention, knows how to evade it as well. So Angie contrived to run downstairs at a moment when his back was turned, and by the time he was again on the look-out, the tall carryall was swinging away from the door.

"Ah, Miss Angie, you leave us early!" were Stein's parting words as he, always on hand, put up the steps and closed the door of the carriage. "You carry all before you while you stay, but you don't forget the old adage, that folks must get all their beauty-sleep on the early side o' midnight. The rule is a good rule for most folks, but in your case it works to a charm, I must say."

Angie had no spirit for responding to Stein's compliments. She was only too glad to lean back in the carriage, and be left to her own thoughts. Still, as the vehicle wheeled round the corner and took the cross road, its passengers could scarcely escape a full view of the ball-room, visible through its long line of windows. Angie gave one look, and — O strange contrariety of human nature! — in spite of all she had felt and suffered that night, owing partly, perhaps, to this very circumstance, she experienced a sudden thrill of mortification and chagrin, as she caught sight of the gallant captain standing up in a country-dance that was just forming, courtly, self-

possessed, handsome as ever, and apparently engrossed by the charms of Polly Stein.

Whether Polly had sought him or he her, how long they danced together, and what time the ball broke up, are matters with which we have nothing to do. The belle of the ball has gone home, and we have no motive for outstaying her.

CHAPTER VIII.

Turning the Tables.

BEWARE of quick tempers and hot blood, whispers Prudence, and it is a wholesome warning; for fire, in all its forms, is a mad element, and needs control. But beware of heart-burnings, is the voice of a deeper wisdom yet; for the former are to the latter what surface flame is to the central fire. The one often evaporates in smoke, the other may thunder in the earthquake or the volcano.

Hot-headed men are suspicious, quarrelsome, dangerous. But there is no nature on earth so stern and desperate as that which, naturally confiding and slow to believe in wrong, becomes at last convinced of misplaced trust and deadly injury. Shallow natures, like soft metals, are prone to quick but evanescent heats. Strong souls, like iron ore, can only be fired by many elements of combustion, long combined; but when they are once aglow, they are streams of fire that course in deep channels and take hard forms. Thus moulded by fate or fortune, they are ready instruments for stern work or for desperate ventures.

Men do not understand this, or if they acknowledge it as a fact, they do not recognize it in individual instances. Popular prejudice has always favoured the theory that quick tempers result from intense sensibility, and consequently, while a man's angry outbreaks are a subject of dread, his warm heart is equally the theme of eulogium. But is this theory true? That there is a correspondence between the heart and the

head there can be no doubt. But is it the deepest feelings, the tenderest hearts, the master powers that vent themselves in extravagant demonstrations, either of love, of threatening, or of wrath? Fickle preferences, short-lived hate, feeble purposes, explode like gunpowder, and may be known by the flash; but great hearts nourish secret fires, and only those who explore deep feel the heat. Thus genius smoulders for years while the kindling process goes on, and resolutions ripen by imperceptible shades of growth, and unexpressed love is constant as the sun, and hate becomes a tyrant.

Then when some great deed is done, the household, the community, the nation wonder: they had not traced the process; how could they anticipate the result?

Had the purblind people at Stein's Plains been asked who among them would be least likely to be guilty of a violent, an unnatural, or a desperate act, they would perhaps have been unanimous in naming George Rawle. What! Geordie? The patient, unselfish, even-tempered Geordie? Idle he might be, thoughtless, unthrifty, — on the down-hill of dissipation, some might add, — but capable of sudden, fearful, reckless resolve and deed! O no, never!

But because George had borne much, was it certain he would bear everything? Because his heart was by nature true and trustful, was it less likely to be envenomed by faithlessness or injustice? Because he had vacillated long, was it inconceivable that he should some day make up his mind? And when the recoil came, when he was maddened, when he was resolved, would the result be nothing more than a noisy explosion? Would it not be the turning-point in a lifetime?

Perhaps the possibility of all this first flashed upon Angie's mind on the night of the ball. Perhaps, long and well as she had known George Rawle, she had never realized the manhood there was in him, until she saw it defied by another than herself. Only in the light of others' contempt did she begin to appreciate the native forces thus trodden underfoot, and to dread their rebound.

Anxiety for George, however, was not the only emotion that sent Angie home from the ball early and dissatisfied. The sudden influx of womanly fear, which took possession of her at his abrupt departure, had brought her nervous excitement to a climax, and reduced her to the weakness of tears; but a vague sense of anger, mortification, disappointment, and finally, jealousy, all combined to chafe, irritate, and oppress her. Very tired she professed to be, and so went at once to bed. For Angie to plead fatigue after a few hours' dancing was a mere pretence; and yet it may be doubted whether truth itself could have found a better expression for her state of mind. She was tired of herself, with whom she had been so well satisfied at the commencement of the evening; tired of everybody whom she had been disposed to like; tired of everything from which she had anticipated pleasure. To get away from the ball, reach home, escape her father's prattle, turn the key of her door upon old Happy, and thus, in a figurative sense, upon the whole world, that was sufficient satisfaction and relief for the present.

Exhausted by painful excitement, and experiencing that reaction which almost amounts to apathy, she mechanically took off her finery, — her last lively emotion for the night evincing itself in the little outburst of vexation with which she tossed lace, flowers, and muslin into a heap, and thrust them into a bureau drawer. It was altogether too cold in her room for any time to be wasted in listlessness or meditation, and the frosty weather having driven her to bed, nature and habit soon put her to sleep.

Either a night's rest or the influence of daylight exerted a happy effect, for morning found her with her accustomed life and energy restored; and if her spirits were still depressed, there was nothing in her looks or movements to contradict a frequent assertion of the neighbours, that Angie Cousin was "a smart little piece." She was up as early as usual, and more than commonly active in her daily round of employments. It is true that, as she peered diligently into the corners of the sitting-room in search of dust, her brow was

more contracted and anxious than the occasion seemed to warrant; there was a thoughtful pensiveness in the manner with which, before washing the breakfast-things, she stirred the hot dish-water with her little mop, and there was a most unlucky vehemence in the way in which she dashed the teapot against the closet shelf, and broke the nose off. Similar fluctuations of temper attended her through the morning. Now she stood at the window, gazing down the road as if she were expecting some one; then walked to the fireplace, and seemed to find interest and excitement in heaping on wood and stirring up a great blaze; then paused before a mirror and surveyed her own features, without observing their dull and vacant expression. But the day was passing heavily. Angie's active duties were accomplished, and she could not compose herself to any sedentary occupation. It was dreary out of doors, the sky grey, the weather cold and raw, and a snowstorm threatening. Mr. Cousin was pottering about at the barn in his queer French fashion, and Angie experienced an unusual sense of loneliness and desertion. None of the girls would come to see her and talk over the ball on such a dismal day, and she shouldn't want their company if they did. At another time she could have put on her hood and run down, as was often her habit, to sit an hour with Mrs. Rawle, George's mother. The distance was not great. She was even now watching the smoke of the cottage chimney, and thinking how neighbourly it looked. But to-day she would not go there for the world; Geordie might be at home, and if not, Mrs. Rawle would talk about nothing but him. How angry he had gone off! — and no wonder! That wicked old uncle of his! how he had lied about the poor fellow! She wished — she wished — oh, she couldn't think of any punishment bad enough to wish that old man! But then Geordie himself had behaved very badly, coming in looking so rowdy, and with that horrid horse-jockey waiting outside; and then treating her so rudely as he did — and insulting the captain! Yes — Geordie had suffered great injustice, and it was a shame! an awful shame! (and here again she put in a

parenthesis of hatred to Baultie); but then he owed her an apology, and the captain, too; and she would have him to know that he must treat her and her friends with respect, or she would have nothing to do with him. She would give anything to see him though, if it were only for five minutes! Where was he? she wondered, and in what company? Could any part of what old Baultie said be true? and if so, what disgrace Geordie was bringing upon himself and her! He had caused her anxiety and mortification enough already. What must the captain have thought at seeing such an outlaw and disturber of the peace on terms of intimacy with her? Of course such a gentleman as the captain must have been disgusted. He was going away in a day or two. She wondered if she should have a chance to set herself right in his eyes? She hoped so. What would he be likely to be doing to-day? Perhaps (and here she felt just such a sharp twinge as she had experienced the night before) perhaps he and Polly Stein were cracking and eating nuts together by the kitchen fire at the tavern. She had heard Polly boast of their enjoying themselves in that way every day after dinner. She didn't more than half believe it though, — she wouldn't.

With this spasmodic resolve to be incredulous of everything disagreeable, she raised her eyes from a little spot on the rag carpet, upon which they had been fixed while she meditated, and looking restlessly out of the window, she saw — could it be? or was she blinded by the snow-flakes which were now filling the air? And she looked more intently; yes (and she gave a nervous start), it was the captain, and somebody following him — a boy! — Stein's stable-boy — and bringing with him the guitar case.

“And here I am with this old print on!” she said to herself, retreating from the window, “and a coloured neckerchief, and a hole in my shoe!” Let it be mentioned in connection with this last circumstance, that Angie was not slovenly — she was naturally the pink of neatness — but they were so poor, and she had but one other pair, and the only way to save them was to wear the old ones at home.

"Oh, Happy!" she exclaimed, in something half-way between a whisper and a shout, as she fled up the narrow stairs that led from the kitchen to her little bedroom, "Captain Josselyn is coming! Ask him into the sitting-room; put on another stick of wood. I'll be down in a minute!"

Every woman, *almost* every woman, knows what such a minute is, — a period of hurry, agitation, and intense activity, longer or shorter according to the capability of the individual. Angie being, as we have said, "a smart little piece," reappeared in an incredibly brief space of time, looking, in her dark bombazet dress and broad white frill, almost as pretty as she did at the ball. Mr. Cousin coming from the barn had met the captain at the door and accompanied him in, so the delay on her part was of no consequence. Already the courtly little Frenchman, gratified at the prospect of a guest and his revenge at piquet, had made the captain quite at home. The latter paid his compliments to Angie with as much easy grace as if nothing unpleasant had occurred the previous evening. Indeed, he seemed to have forgotten every circumstance of that occasion, except his own delight in her society; and the only reference he made to the interruption of that enjoyment, was when he saw her give a glance at the guitar. He had taken the instrument from its case, which was slightly wet with the snow, and had laid it on a chair.

"You see I am persevering, Miss Angie," he said. "I have come to finish my song."

Angie blushed, thanked him, and felt herself in a little flutter of pleasurable excitement. The condescension of the captain, and the surprise of his visit, were such antidotes to the vexation and chagrin she had been suffering through the long, dull day! They all sat and chatted awhile by the fire-side, or rather, Captain Josselyn and Mr. Cousin kept up an animated conversation; the captain proving equally entertaining to both his listeners, — pleasing and flattering the old gentleman, by deferring to his opinions and making apt use of French phrases; and paying court to Angie by a tender devotion of manner and glances of most unequivocal admira-

tion. The latter, however, were so confident and presuming, that Angie, despite a sense of elation at the conquest she had achieved, looked first to the right, then to the left, and frequently took shelter beneath her long eyelashes, in the endeavour to avoid those peering eyes which, as the twilight wrapped everything else in shadow, seemed to gain proportionately in their fixedness and intensity, and, as they reflected the fire-glow, took a vivid topaz colour, like crystal goblets of wine. Angie was an inexperienced, not a brazen coquette, and had scarcely mettle enough to resist this military lover with the intoxicating eyes. So, restless and embarrassed, she was glad when Mr. Cousin called for a candle, and challenged his visitor to their game of piquet. This also gave her an opportunity to make some housewifely preparations for tea, which she did with native quickness and tact, moving about with that daintiness with which a girl moves when she is suspicious that a lover is watching her. Happy, who needed no hint from her mistress, or rather who was mistress herself in her own department, was already preparing to fry some doughnuts, and any practised ear could distinguish from the sitting-room the sizzling of the lard over the kitchen fire.

Angie got out the best tablecloth from an old-fashioned press, but postponed spreading it on the table until Happy should bring in tea, because there was a very large darn in the worn damask, which she depended upon covering with the tray. Then she went to the cupboard and took down from an upper shelf her stock of plate, — a few little silver teaspoons — three — how fortunate that there were just three! The gilt-edged cups and saucers too; there was a sufficient number of them left unbroken. The gilt was all rubbed off, to be sure, but then they showed what they had been once, and in their present state they matched all the better with the white crockery dishes and plates; but oh, mischief and agony! the teapot! the broken-nosed teapot! and it was their only one — what should she do?

But before she could think further on the matter, she heard

a sound which betokened still greater mischief and agony. It was well she stood within the closet door, out of sight of their visitor, otherwise he might have wondered at the agitation she manifested. Somebody had lifted the kitchen latch — that was all. Yes — but Angie could not be mistaken as to who it was that had lifted the latch with just that click. She listened breathlessly, teapot in hand; then detected precisely the sound she had expected to hear next! — a footstep — Geordie's. Oh! how unlucky!

But she was a girl of good courage, especially in emergencies. By the time she had deliberately set down the teapot, and slowly withdrawn her hand from it, she had resolved what to do. She would confront him at once, treat him coolly, and dismiss him, if she could, ignorant of the captain's visit. It would never do to let them meet under such circumstances. She was surprised that just now George should want to put himself in her way! Inconsistent girl! Only that morning she had felt that she would give all the world to see him for five minutes. Perhaps it was some excuse for her unreasonableness, that she so dreaded another collision between the young men. "Anyhow" was her conclusion, as she slid out of the sitting-room, "I must get rid of him to-night, if I have to run to the ends of the earth, to make it up with him to-morrow."

Ah, Angie, to-morrow! "Whereas you know not what will be on the morrow."

Geordie was standing with his arms resting upon the high kitchen mantelpiece, and his head so bent over on his hands, that he seemed to be watching Happy's doughnuts in the process of frying.

Angie thought he would, as usual, approach her humbly, with that pleading look of his — but, no; he did not even turn round when she entered the kitchen. So she walked up, with a hesitating step, and stood beside him. Then he looked at her, but only as if to assure himself that it was she, for he did not speak, and the next instant he was staring into the fire

again. Angie took a fork and turned the doughnuts one by one. Geordie watched her as she did it.

"You're wet," she said at length.

He looked down at the steam that was evaporating from his damp clothes, but otherwise took no notice of the remark.

"Your doughnuts are burning, Happy!" were the next words spoken.

"So they be, Miss Angie!" exclaimed the old negro woman, who had been busy moulding dough, with her back to the fire; and pouncing upon them, she carried them off, frying-pan and all, to the pantry, and (trust a negro's shrewdness for that) took care not to come back again.

The clattering of Happy's rolling-pin and the hissing of the hot fat, thus suddenly subsiding, the kitchen seemed fearfully still to Angie, who was getting nervous and impatient.

A deep sigh from Geordie first broke the stillness, and was at once succeeded by the petulant exclamation, — "What makes you stand there so, Geordie? you worry me to death."

At this he removed his arms from the mantel-piece, raised his head, and fixed his eyes full and steadily upon her. Such presumption in her shy lover would have amazed her, but for a something in his gaze, which she, standing as she did then and there, could not quite appropriate to herself. The look did not seem to be meant for her — at least not for her ordinary self. It was as if passing beyond, behind, within her; it comprehended all the past, summed up a life's experience, and gauged its value. She felt this, even before he spoke; but the impression was confirmed when he said, like a man soliloquizing, "I have known you a great many years, Angie. How much I have thought of you, haven't I?"

Before she could answer, his eyes were turned away from her, and were wandering round the room.

"I have had a great many good times in this kitchen," he said meditatively, and still as if speaking to himself. Probably

the old wooden settle by the fireside, the clock ticking in one corner, the polished warming-pan, which was such a capital thing for popping corn, the worn turkey-wing, which served for a hearth-brush, the old cat rubbing her head against his leg, — all were reminiscences of those “good times,” for he looked from one to another with as much earnestness as if he were taking an inventory, and finally stooped down and stroked the cat’s back.

Angie was perplexed by his conduct. He seemed so independent of her presence, that she almost felt herself a supernumerary.

“Where’s your father?” he abruptly asked, glancing at the chair by the window in which Mr. Cousin was in the habit of sitting.

Here was trouble. Angie stammered a little as she answered, “He’s — he’s busy — just now.”

Her reply was apparently a matter of indifference to the young man, for his only comment was, “I saw his snuff-box there, — it made me think of him — that’s all.”

The snuff-box was on the window-sill. George walked to the window, and handling the box, as if it were a talismanic medium of thought, looked out at the night. The storm was gathering, and the wind as it whistled past rattled the window-sash, and caused the lamp on the table to flicker. Angie, standing by the fire, shivered. “What is he looking at? What can he be thinking of? Why doesn’t he speak? Why doesn’t he go?” These were the mental queries that agitated her; and the only answer, for a space that seemed interminable, was the sighing of the wind.

At last, when he turned it was to walk straight up to her, lay his hand on her head, and gently smooth her hair, — a thing he had not dared to do before, since the days when she was first old enough to put it up with a comb.

This audacity — evidently unconscious on his part — awed her. All the nonsense, all the coquetry, all the false pride

of the girl were subdued on the instant. She submitted to the caress with as much docility as if she had been an infant.

He only passed his hand over her hair once or twice — in much the same dreamy way that he had stroked the fur of the cat. “Angie,” he said, almost unintelligibly, — and she looked up, fearing he was choking, but making a great effort, he went on with a firm voice, and she listened breathlessly, — “Angie, that old man lied last night. I want you to remember that. It may come true, — God knows! — but it was a lie then. Don’t forget what I tell you, or think any worse of me than you can help. A man may be driven on to the rocks and shipwrecked, but it ain’t as if he went of his own accord. I know I am a poor dog, and have had my day!”

Angie trembled, and made an effort to interrupt him; but he did not notice her, and went on. It seemed as if he had braced himself up to a certain point, and nothing could stop him now.

“Turn a dog out of doors! Set every tormenting thing on him — abuse him till he can’t stand it, and never call him back with a kind word, and I tell you he’ll go mad and bite, or run away; but he was an honest dog once — mind that — and loved his friends, and would have died for ’em. No matter what becomes of him now — it’s all over. There,” he added, drawing a long breath, “you’re free to go back to *him*,” and he pointed to the door leading to the little sitting-room. “He’s a stranger — but I dare say he’s enough sight better fellow than I am; I hope so, any way.”

Touched and grieved by his appeal to her sympathies, Angie had been ready to burst into tears, comfort him, and entreat his forgiveness; but conscious-stricken at his last words, as well as mortified at his knowledge of a rival’s presence in the next room, she could only follow the direction of his eyes with a confused medley of sensations and a shame-faced countenance. Even in his depth of contrition and self-abandonment, he was getting the mastery of her.

And so it was that she, the defiant, high-spirited coquette, who had kept him in fetters now fourteen years, offered no re-

sistance, but stood still as a statue, while he first dismissed, and then — oh, unthought-of presumption! — bent down and kissed her. Since she first took womanly airs and forbade him the liberty, he had never ventured on such an offence. Even on occasion of a country romp, or a game at forfeits, he had only half-taken advantage of his opportunities; yet now he pressed his lips to hers without apology and without rebuke.

I say *now*, — and yet it did not seem as if the kiss had much to do with the now of their lives. It was more like a seal set upon all the past love and friendship there had been between them. It was a long kiss — giving time for his eyes to look full into hers, and daguerreotype her image on his heart. There was no rapture in it, and no pain. It asked for no response, any more than if she were dead. It was a benediction merely, and a farewell.

“Now go!” he said. The words were addressed to her, and were peremptory. But she never stirred, though he turned and was gone out of the house in an instant.

She was like one petrified. Not until the last echo of his step, and of the house door which he had banged after him, had died away, did she move from the spot where he had left her. Then she ran to the door, opened it and looked out, but only to retreat before a heavy gust of wind, which sent the snow whirling in her face and seemed to mock her. As she re-entered the kitchen, she stumbled over the guitar case, which stood in the corner. Perhaps George had stumbled over it too, on his entrance. At all events, here was the traitor that had betrayed the captain’s visit.

By this time Happy, as prompt on a slight hint to re-occupy as to evacuate her premises, had resumed her sway at the kitchen fire, and was bustling about to atone for the interruption to her labours. “One spark to time ’s ’bout enough for we!” she muttered.

The doughnuts had soaked fat, and old Hap was cross. On such occasions there was nothing for it but to submit to her dictation, at least when, as now, Angie had no heart for

coaxing her into good humour. So she obeyed the old negress's directions like an automaton, and helped her "hurry up tea." But the elasticity was all gone out of Angie. She was no longer the blithe little coquette, the conscious beauty, the dainty housewife. So far from finding it hard to avoid the captain's eye, she did not even know whether he looked at her. With her own hands she spread the tablecloth, so as to bring the great darn directly in front of their visitor's plate; she gave him the hornspoon out of the sugar bowl, and brandished her broken-nosed teapot with a vacant air.

The tea hour seemed interminable. The songs afterwards had no music for her, and she forgot to thank the singer. Her father accused her of being "ver' tired after de ball," and Captain Josselyn must have found her society less inspiring than usual, for he yawned more than once.

Mr. Cousin had already been allowed to avenge his ill luck at piquet, and as the parties had played innocently (that is, without the excitement of gambling; for the old Frenchman had declined playing for money), neither cared to resume the game.

Fortunately Stein's stable-boy came early for the guitar, and the fact that the storm was increasing furnished an excuse for the captain, at the same time, to bid them a hasty good-night, and avail himself of the boy's guidance back to the tavern, which was the more desirable, as the lad, who himself resembled a moving snow-drift, declared that the road was already covered with several inches depth of snow.

CHAPTER IX.

Shrift and Absolution.

MARGERY RAWLE stood leaning over the back of a chair at her kitchen-window, and gazed anxiously through her spectacles down the road. "Oh, there he comes!" she said to herself at last, and drew a sigh of relief — this sigh of relief being as near to an indication of joy as poor Margery ever attained, and the best approach to a welcome which George could consequently anticipate. Her reception of him not being of so cheerful a nature as to call for much response, it was not strange that the "Dearie me!" with which she met him, and a disparaging remark about the weather, as she watched him beat the snow off his feet, was only replied to on George's part by the words, "Yes — a great storm;" and that then the mother subsided into a knitting-machine, and the son sat down in silence by the fire.

George loved his mother better than anyone in the world except Angie; and he was the sun and centre of her life's orbit; but there was very little demonstration of affection between them. He always treated her with respect, and when about home, performed for her all those offices which demanded strength or involved exposure; and she spent the greater part of her time and thoughts in motherly cares for his comfort; but as to any more sentimental indication of their relationship, it was unthought of and unmissed on either side.

Nor, on the other hand, were they guilty of mutual reproaches and recriminations. Margery viewed George's long absences from home, his neglect of the farm, and his general want of prosperity, as so many features of that ill-luck which had attended her from childhood; and forbearing anything like accusation or censure, she suffered all her regrets and all her fears to take the form of gentle moanings, self-pitying ejaculations, and suppressed groans, compared to which her sigh of relief was positively cheerful and exhilarating.

George was so accustomed to this chronic depression of spirits, which had characterized his mother ever since his earliest recollection, that he never dreamed of expostulating against it or inquiring into its cause. Its hopelessness served, no doubt, to rob him of that impetus to exertion which his home might otherwise have afforded; still it would little have become him to complain of any symptoms of a distress which he was doing nothing to alleviate.

So, deep and sincere as was their love for each other, there was a certain want of sympathy and confidence between them, which gave an air of restraint to their most familiar intercourse.

He sat and watched her fingers awhile as they plied the knitting-needles, now and then stealing glances at her face; but finding that he was continually catching her eye, as it turned anxiously upon him, he rose hastily and went out.

He soon returned, bringing with him an armful of wood, and continued to go and come until he had filled the kitchen wood-box, and built up a little wood-pile in the adjoining pantry. His mother had risen at the same time to prepare tea, and thus they passed and repassed each other, both active in the fulfilment of household tasks. Then came a lull indoors. Margery stood watching the teakettle, which refused to boil; George was plying his hatchet in the shed outside. At last, when everything was ready for supper, and George still kept at work, the old woman was obliged to go to the shed-door, and call him.

"Come, George," she said, "the toast is coolin', and I've put the tea to steep. Come, have a dish o' tea — it's so restin'."

George looked up at the sound of her voice, and stood leaning on his hatchet.

"Tea ready, mother?"

"Yes; and there's no need to be choppin' any more wood. I'm purty well on't for kindlins."

"Better to have enough," murmured George, as he came in, hung his cap on a nail, and sat down at the table.

It was a brief meal. George had no appetite, and Margery's emaciated frame never seemed to require more nourishment than a bird's. George gulped down his tea, and, resuming his cap, went out again. Margery did not miss him until she had put everything to rights in her department. Then the flashing of his lantern outside the window attracted her notice.

"Law's sakes!" she ejaculated, "if that 'ere boy ain't a-shovellin' out paths this time o' night, and 'fore the storm's half over. Why, what possesses you, George?" she cried, opening the house-door just enough to thrust her head out, and speaking in a shrill, cracked tone, "the snow'll all be driven in agin 'fore mornin'. What's the use?"

"I've only been clearing a great heap away from the door," answered George, "and opening a track out to the road. I shall be through in a few minutes. Don't stand there, mother, you'll catch cold."

The widow retreated from the doorway, but hovered round the window until her son came in, heated and wet, when she renewed her remonstrances.

"It'll drift in some more, I dare say," replied the young man; "but what I've done to-night'll make an easier job for somebody in the morning. I don't like the idea of the house's getting banked up."

He now sat down quietly for awhile by the fireside; but either he was uncommonly restless or oppressed with nervous apprehensions, for he soon started up abruptly, and saying, "It'll be bad getting to the well in the morning — I think I'll draw a few buckets of water to-night," he once more sallied out for the fulfilment of this task. And even when this and one or two similar employments were exhausted, he could not settle into his wonted composure. Three several times he ascended to his little bedroom above-stairs, and was absent some minutes; these excursions being rendered more observable from the necessity he was under of each time lighting a lamp — a process which, in this comparatively primitive age, involved the selection of a red-hot coal, the elevation of

it between the tongs, and the application of a puff of breath at the same instant that it was brought into collision with the lampwick.

"Seems to me you've got great works goin' on overhead," said Margery, peering at him above her spectacles as he blew his lamp out for the third time, and set it on the mantelpiece.

He made no reply, but took a seat astride a chair, his face towards the back of it, his chin just resting on the upper bar. It was now nearly the widow's bedtime, and George followed her with his eye while she raked up the coals, closed the window-shutters, put the dust-brush and house-broom, which had been used about the hearth, into the oven as a precaution against their setting anything on fire, and made other little preparations for retiring to her bedroom, which adjoined the kitchen.

"Mother!" said he at length, as he saw that she was really going.

She stopped short, and looked at him.

"Mother! — I — I —"

"Why, what's the matter, George?" said she anxiously, for there was an unnatural hesitancy to his voice which alarmed her. "Don't you feel well? What's the matter?"

"O yes, I'm all right; but I — I was thinking — mother, I've never been much comfort to you, have I?"

"All I've had since your father died; but it's a poor world — there ain't much comfort in it after all!" and the widow ended with an "O, dear!" and her accustomed sigh.

"Perhaps I might have been more to you, mother," said George, meditatively. "I suppose I might; but as it is, I doubt whether you wouldn't have been better off if I'd never been born. I've been more plague than profit."

"Mothers don't reckon that way, George; nor it ain't like you neither to be so down at the heel. I'm afraid you've caught cold. Hadn't I better bile the kettle, and make you some ginger tea?"

"O no," replied George, with a forced laugh at the suggestion; "I'm well enough. It's bedtime, is it?" He rose to

once more light his lamp, and as the fire was raked up, he applied the wick to that of the lighted candle which his mother held, but his usually steady hand shook so, that his efforts were unsuccessful.

"Why, George," remarked his mother, "you've got an agur fit on you. You're as bad as the dominie's wife when she first had the shakin' palsy. I do believe you're goin' to be took sick — this awful night too; dearie me!" she groaned outright.

Again George had recourse to the mock laugh, at the same time supporting both lamps on the table, and with his back turned to his mother, making another and more successful experiment with them.

"Don't you be worried, mother," said he; "don't you worry about me ever, let what will come — promise me that."

He spoke the last words so earnestly, that, although his face was turned from her, she scanned his figure inquiringly, as she answered,

"Law, George, it's no use makin' such promises as that. It's in the natur' o' mothers to be always a worryin' about their chil'en."

"Then they're better off without'em," said George, "just as I said. If I was out of the way now, and you could only forget you ever had a son — why, it would be the best thing that could happen to you, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, if we were all dead and gone, there'd be an end to our troubles," said Margery, despairingly; "I sometimes wish we were, for my part."

"It seems as if things couldn't be much worse than they are," was George's comment on this wholesale outburst. "That's the only comfort I have in looking ahead; but, somehow, I — I —" and here George stammered badly.

"You what, George?"

"Why, I feel as if I should like, before I go any further, to make a clean breast of the past. Mother," and the quivering of his voice was even more perceptible than the shaking of his hand had been a moment before. "I've been a poor, good-

for-nothing fellow, and everybody's turned against me. I've treated you worse than the rest, because you had more claim on me; but you — you've always been a — a — mother to me."

"Of course I have, Geordie," said she; "other folks may be what they please, but mothers are mothers to their dyin' day."

"I know," responded George, his words half-choking him; "and that's why, when I don't care for the rest, I do care for you. Let them say what they will — and I'll warrant it'll be the worst. You won't say much, but you'll think all the more; and I want you to think the best you can, and hope the best you can, in spite of anybody."

"Of course I will, George," said she; "haven't I always?"

"Yes; but let the worst come to the worst, you must believe that I stood it as long as I could, and fought even after they had me down."

There was anger in his voice, and fire in his eye, as he finished speaking.

"Who had you down?" cried Margery, in a fresh alarm. "Why, George, have you been fightin'?"

"Me? O no," he replied, recollecting himself instantly, and moderating his tone. "I didn't mean anything. I was only thinking how I'd struggled against all sorts of injuries, and didn't know as I should hold out for ever. Folks have been too hard on me, mother. My uncle Baultie is my greatest enemy. It's he that has pushed me on to destruction. That old man and I have got to come to a reckoning yet. I don't know how it'll go between us, but he'll have the worst of it if he gets his dues;" and anger once more gaining the mastery of George, he shook his clenched fist, and his usually mild eye glittered with excitement.

Margery was frightened. "Oh, George," she cried, in a deprecatory tone, "don't you fly in the face of your uncle Baultie! He's a hard man — hard as a flint. If you run against his sharp corners it'll be you that'll get the worst on't. Take my advice, George, and be careful for the future, when you're riled, not to put yourself in his way."

It was difficult to judge what effect this expostulation had upon George. He seemed resolved to subdue, or at least hide his passion; but as the expression of wrath subsided on his face, it was succeeded by one of stern determination, which steeled his features when he next spoke, though his tone was sad rather than vindictive.

"We won't say anything about the future," was his answer; "that's all a big secret — the future is, mother; it's only about the past I have one word more to add. I've been a poor sort of a son, that's a fact, and there's no denying it. I have never done anything for your comfort or happiness; but — but," and here his features softened, and he looked tenderly at her, "I've always loved you."

The poor widow only stared.

"You believe it, don't you?" with a pleading smile — his boyish smile, which he had never lost.

"I do, George."

"And I always *shall* love you. Good-night." And he started for the door, then stopped, turned, and came back to where Margery stood stupified and puzzled. He came close to her, and studied her face lovingly, but did not kiss, caress, or even touch her. It would have been too foreign to their natures, and the habits in which he had been nurtured. He merely took hold of her apron-string, and wound it round his fingers, as a child would do. "I don't care a bit for any harm I've done, or mean to do to anybody else," said he; "but if ever I've been a trial to you (and I know I have often enough), I — I'm sorry."

"Law, George," said his mother, "what matter is it? Folks don't harbour anything against their own flesh and blood. You're dreadful downhearted to-night; go to bed."

"So I will." And he went as far as the door, opened it, then stood a moment outside with the latch-handle in his hand. "It's all right between you and me, mother, ain't it?" said he, looking back as if eager for one more assurance.

"Yes, all right," was the answer, — "that is, if you've got

bedclothes enough. It's a cold night, and you're agurish, you know."

"Plenty," was the response, — "and — well — no matter, I guess it's all right;" and he slowly closed the door after him.

"What's got into the boy?" soliloquized Margery, as she set back the chairs and completed her preparations for the night; "I never see him so afore. O dear! It's the tavern, mebbe — or bad company — or Angie Cousin, perhaps. O Lud! I wish he'd let her alone! Anyways he's awfully down in the mouth, and I shan't sleep a wink to-night."

But Margery had learned to sleep in spite of trouble. She worried awhile, groaned aloud, tried in vain to say her prayers, but fell asleep at last, in spite of the storm raging wildly without, and of anxiety and grief within.

CHAPTER X.

A Crime and a Bit of Proof.

WHAT is that? and Margery started up in her bed, and looked wildly around. The wind? No; a window-shutter banging? Something worse! And Margery sprang out of bed.

"Who's there?" cried the old woman. "Speak! Who's there?"

"Me, it's me! it's Hannah — Hannah Rawle. Open the door, Margery! let me in," was shrieked from without, while the rattling of the latch and the creaking of the door gave emphasis to the cry.

Margery's trembling hands fumbled at the bolt, but the moment the wooden bar was withdrawn, the door which opened inwards yielded to some heavy pressure, and a tall figure, all in white, apparently the very genius of the storm, was precipitated full-length upon the kitchen-floor.

The cry of "Margery, Margery!" now gave place to that of "George, George!" whom the mother, screaming at the

foot of the stairs, thus summoned to the scene. But there was no answer. Margery, frightened and bewildered, nevertheless closed and latched the outer door, bent an instant over the prostrate figure on the hearth, and finding it still motionless, commenced groping her way to her son's attic, calling out his name at every step.

Day was just dawning in the eastern horizon, but the house was still dark as night. "George! wake up, for mercy's sake!" shouted the poor woman close to his bed. Horrified at getting no reply, she passed her hands wildly over the counterpane, which was smooth as woman's skill could make it, and over the pillow, which no head had pressed that night.

"Good Lud! What does this mean? Good Lud! Good Lud!" ejaculated the trembling old woman, as she tottered down the staircase.

A heavy groan was escaping from Hannah Rawle, as Margery re-entered the kitchen. A moment more, and she had partially revived, had drawn up her limbs, and assuming a sitting posture, was rocking herself to and fro, making a wailing noise, but as yet uttering nothing intelligible. The fact, however, that she had fled through the storm in her night-clothes, and was half-dead with cold and exhaustion, was intelligible enough and awful enough to make further explanation for the moment superfluous. Margery, scarcely less horrified and paralyzed, had still sufficient strength to wrap a blanket around Hannah, and then, kneeling in the ashes, to unrake the fire. There was just life enough left in the coals to diffuse a little glimmer of light. Margery, herself shivering with cold and dread, and watching the pitiable object beside whom she crouched, could see the working of Hannah Rawle's face, but could not comprehend its expression, nor the wild and vehement gestures which she made with one hand while she held the other stiff and clenched.

"Oh, speak, speak, Hannah! can't you speak?" cried Margery, imploringly, raising her voice to its utmost pitch,

and gesticulating in her turn, — for Hannah was partially deaf.

Hannah almost rose to her feet in the effort she now made to loosen her rigid lips; then failing in the attempt to speak, she gave vent to a fearful shriek, and fell heavily to the floor.

Margery now bethought herself of her cupboard, and a little demijohn of West India rum which she kept there, and she lost no time in pouring some of the spirit into a glass and putting it to Hannah's lips. The first effort to swallow was abortive, but after a second and third attempt, the moistened jaws relaxed; then the scorching liquid found its way down her throat, and its effects were soon discernible, for Hannah, as if delivered from an iron spell, gasped out eagerly, — "Where's Geordie? Oh! my old man! where's Geordie? Call him; call him — quick."

"George is away, George isn't at home," said Margery, placing her mouth close to Hannah's ear, and speaking with effort.

"Oh! call him! call him! perhaps he is; send him to my old man", persisted Hannah.

Relieved, even in this first tumult of terror, to know that her own recent ignorance of George's absence and her vain calls for his aid had been unheeded by Hannah, as she lay stretched in unconsciousness; Margery assured her that George was not sleeping at home that night, and entreated to know what had happened to Baultie. Was he sick, was he dying, or what was the matter on the mountain?

"Dying! He's dead, fur's I know," shrieked Hannah; her eyes glaring wildly, and her fist brandished in the air. "They've killed him! they've killed him! they've beaten his brains out!"

"Killed him! They? Who?" ejaculated Margery, looking round the room in a vague horror, as if she heard murder stalking about the house and saw death in the air.

"The robbers! the murderers! the villains! Send help; send help, Margery; send help to my old man!"

"Oh, who shall I send?" exclaimed Margery, wringing her hands. "George ought to be here," she added, in an outburst of agony; "but he isn't. O dear! O dear!"

"I must go myself," said Hannah, with desperation; and folding the blanket about her, the resolute old woman sprang to her feet, but they failed her and she fell. They were helpless — they were frozen. She groaned aloud in her despair, but she was a woman of a dauntless spirit. She had not made her way thus far through frost and snow-drifts for nothing. She had sunk at Margery's threshold, in the belief that her night's work was done; but with the fresh necessity for action her energy revived.

"Dress yourself, Margery," she said with authority. "Let me alone," — for Margery was crooning over the frozen feet, and chafing them with her withered hands. "Put on your clothes as quick as you can, and raise the neighbours. You can get across the fields to Mr. Cousin's; you'll have hard work, but you can do it. At any rate, you must try. I can take care of myself; so, go! go!"

And Margery went. How she got dressed, how she waded through the snow, called up the family, gave the alarm, and got back to the shelter of her own roof, no one who knew her could comprehend. But there is a surplus power in everybody, waiting to be called out on emergencies, and the feeble old woman, who never in winter-time was wont to crawl beyond her own woodshed, accomplished almost without conscious effort the labour from which on such a night a strong man would have shrunk. She did not return alone to her cottage; Angie accompanied her. They spoke only once on the way, and then it was to ask each other, with intense earnestness, the same question which had been the first on Hannah Rawle's lips, — "Where is Geordie?" The question was simultaneous; so was the reply. It consisted merely of a piteous shake of the head, after which, with jaws chattering and brains bewildered, the two women fought their way in silence through the snow and wind back to the kitchen, where the half-frozen fugitive from midnight murder still sat crouch-

ing in her blanket, muttering her lamentations, and gesticulating with her upraised hand.

To kindle a fire, bathe, chafe, and, as far as possible, restore Hannah Rawle's frozen limbs, were the next tasks to which Margery and Angie applied themselves. Not until the fire sent forth its ruddy blaze, and a lamp was lit, did the night-wanderer's real condition reveal itself. Her flesh was not only stiffened with frost, but was scratched, bleeding, and torn. Her night-clothes, of home-spun flannel, were tattered and blood-stained, and her white hair was tangled about her face and head. All this might have been the natural result of her night journey down the mountain, where her path led through swamp and thicket; and where briers and under-wood, half-hidden by snow, had to be encountered at every step. But this was not all. A more fearful spectacle was revealed, and a more awful tragedy testified to, by the wounds on her hands and wrists, the dislocation of one of her finger-joints, and a contusion on her face; proving the fact, which the courageous old woman herself averred, that in the struggle which had taken place between her and the assassin she had fought like a wild-cat.

"Was there more than one?" asked Angie, who, kneeling on the floor beside Hannah, was fastening a bandage round one of her bleeding ankles.

Hannah did not hear! "How many were there? how many men?" reiterated Angie, putting her question in a new form and speaking louder, though in a much less steady voice than at first, while Margery, who was stirring the fire, held the tongs with a trembling hand, and listened for Hannah's reply.

"How many? How should I know? 'Twas dark as pitch. There might ha' been two or three, or like enough half-a-dozen on 'em. 'Twas my old man's screams an' the shakin' o' the room that fust woke me. They had Baultie down by that time, and were struggling to hold him. I sprang on one of 'em, and tried to drag him off. I twisted him round and round, and held on with the grip of an old watch-dog; I

would never ha' let go on him so long as the breath was in me; but he was young and strong, and he shook me off. 'Twas then, I think, when they found they'd got more'n one to deal with, that they give my poor old man a death-stroke, for he'd screamed and called my name afore; but I never caught a sound from the corner where he lay arterwards."

She seemed to be sustained by excitement while she dwelt on the particulars of her own struggle with the housebreakers, but the few last words affirming her conviction of her husband's murder were uttered with a shrill, piteous accent, which ended in a loud wail.

Margery sank into a chair with an exclamation of horror. Angie was silent; she still knelt beside Hannah, but the poor girl's hands refused their office; she almost shrank from the cold limb to which she had been ministering. The whole person of the woman who had so lately fought hand to hand with death, seemed invested with something forbidding and awful. For a moment Angie did not venture to touch her, or interrupt her prolonged cry.

She soon interrupted herself, however, with the abrupt question — "Have they started? have they gone? Have you sent help to my old man?" Angie repeated an assurance already given, that her father and the stable boy were on the alert; that they were harnessing a horse when she left the house; that before this time all the neighbourhood was roused and every possible effort being made in Baultie Rawle's behalf.

"It's no use," said Hannah, relapsing into her hopeless tone. "Let 'em go; but they'll find him dead. Ah, well! we can't die but once, and me an' my old man's seen length o' days already; but they might ha' let us go in peace, and not drag folks out o' their beds to murder 'em."

This first utterance of human complaint brought Hannah more into sympathy with the weakness of her auditors, and gave them the nerve required to exercise some authority, or at least persuasion, towards her.

"Perhaps they haven't quite killed him," ventured Angie; "we'll trust not."

"Anyways, Hannah," suggested Margery, "you'll catch your death there on the floor. Just get into my bed now; you'll be comfortable there, and handylike when they come to fetch you news from up the mountain."

Hannah resisted at first, declaring she would stay where she was until she knew the worst. Neither would she die; she would live. Yes, live to see the murderers brought to light, and justice done against them; live to bear testimony to the crime, and have the rascals brought to the gallows. "See here!" and with a triumphant gesture she lifted her left hand, hitherto tightly clenched, and as she raised it aloft displayed a portion of some dark object, apparently a rag of woollen cloth, over which her half-frozen fingers were convulsively clasped. "He thought he'd got clear o' me, the rascal!" she exclaimed, with revengeful vehemence, "but I'll teach him yet to know the meaning of an old woman's grip. He's slipped through my fingers once, but he's left behind what'll slip a rope round his neck one o' these days, or my name's not Hannah Rawle. I'll hold on to my proof till the law holds on to him."

Margery, awed by Hannah's stern expression of purpose, gazed at her in a sort of stupor. Angie, on the contrary, instinctively stretched out her hand, and almost snatched at the boasted token of crime.

"Let go!" cried Hannah, in a fierce, forbidding tone. "Don't touch!" and she covetously hid behind her the hand and its prize.

Angie drew back a step, — there was a moment of silence, — then Margery renewed her whining entreaties and expostulations on the subject of her sister-in-law's sufferings and exposure should she continue longer in her present position on the floor; and this time successfully — though it was evident that Hannah permitted herself to be assisted to bed rather with a view to Margery's satisfaction than her own.

Whether her senses were rendered more than ordinarily

acute, or her suspicions sharpened by her terrible experience, the old woman still kept a jealous hold upon her memento of a night of horrors, giving Margery a sharp repulse when she innocently suggested that the cold, damp thing would chill the whole bed, and watching Angie with as much distrust as if she had been a huge mothworm, whose only purpose in life was the acquisition of a woollen rag.

It was the feverish notion of an excited brain. But excited, intensified, maddened as the old woman's suspicions might be, they fell short of the truth; for, in the possession of a rag — that rag — all the faculties of Angie's mind and body were concentrated. She watched, she waited, she listened, she hoped, she prayed; prayed that the search on the mountain might be long delayed; hoped that Hannah would fall asleep meanwhile; listened to every breath she drew; watched and waited her opportunity. And it came. Hannah continued long awake. With staring eyes and menacing fist she lay muttering her lamentations and threats; then she slept — by snatches only — still she slept. In those days, and in that district, ardent spirit was the common, perhaps in a case like that of Hannah Rawle, the best restorative; and the Jamaica rum had been too freely applied to produce any other effect than that of resuscitating the sufferer. It first helped to excite, but afterwards to compose the patient.

There was an east window to the little bed-room, and the pale morning light was sufficient for Angie's purpose. Margery had crept upstairs, and her step could be heard in George's attic overhead. Hannah lay motionless, and her breath came at equal intervals. Angie carefully turned down the bedclothes and applied her fingers to the object which the sleeping woman still hugged to her side. Slow, Angie; steady! Ah! take care; she stirs! The young girl is warned, and withdraws her hand. The old woman starts convulsively, mutters, and closes her fingers tighter than ever over her prize. There is a pause; then another opportunity; another attempt, which this time promises success, but, as before, ends in a sudden failure.

Angie retreats almost discouraged; her chest heaves; there is a rising in her throat which seems to stifle her. Still her eye is on the coveted rag; her ear is strained; her attitude keen and watchful. There is a long interval of silence and suspense. Margery's attention continues engrossed above-stairs, for she can be heard groping about the attic. Hark, now! what is Hannah dreaming of? for she cries out in her sleep, and grasps with both hands at an imaginary object in the air. It eludes her grasp, and the hands drop empty. Quick, Angie! — now is your chance! She is unconscious of her loss — a moment more, and she may awake and claim the thing you have pounced upon.

But now Angie has it; she has pulled it into shape; she has held it up to the light — and it is — O heavens! it is the thing she feared — a mitten, a home-knit mitten — Geordie's. His mother had shaped it to her boy's hand; Angie herself had marked it with her lover's name. A murderer's hand! a felon's name! Have pity — have pity, O God!

What is she doing? Why is she tearing at it so frantically? She dare not destroy it. It will surely be claimed at her hands and her own act would bring suspicion on the house. But she can destroy its identity. With a crooked pin for her weapon, and horrid fear for her spur, she is tearing out the red letters, "G. R.", copied from her own sampler, wrought by her own fingers less than a week ago, — George himself looking on.

How the damp worsted clings! Be careful, Angie; a broken stitch may betray you and him. Quick — but leave no tell-tale sign! With one eye on her task and the other casting rapid glances at her sleeping tyrant, she pulls, picks, tears at the threads; with a prudence, born of dread, she crouches on the floor, and spreads her apron on her lap, that not a shred of the fatal colour may escape her. Your time is up, Angie! The sleeper moves. See! see! She is feeling for it!

And she has it again. One frantic effort, and the last red stitch is extracted; the mitten is flung within reach of the

groping fingers; they have closed over it, and the old woman wakens with a grunt of satisfaction at the security in which she still holds her prize, while Angie makes haste to empty the contents of her apron into the fire before Margery, whose step is already on the stairs, can re-enter the kitchen.

She has succeeded — and it gives her breathing-time. Fresh witnesses of guilt may arrive at any moment, but she has disarmed one; and, tortured as she is with horror and apprehension, there is a tinge of triumph in her agony.

There are seasons in human experience so intense that the whole of life seems to be concentrated in the passing moment. The earth is falling from beneath our feet; we catch at straws, and the very effort affords us an instant's respite from despair.

The brief advantage gained, we pause, shudder, and again cry out for help.

"What next?" thought Angie, as, sinking down like one crushed by some heavy weight, she listened to the ticking of the clock above her head, and felt as if each stroke were the stroke of doom.

The answer came at length in the stamping of feet outside the house, and a quick hand laid on the door-latch.

"Who's that?" exclaimed Hannah, sitting up straight in bed. "Is that Geordie?"

"No," answered Margery, who had also given a start, "tain't him, tain't his step;" and as she spoke the door opened abruptly, and Dick Van Hausen entered.

It was now broad daylight, and Van Hausen's eye falling at once upon the object of his visit, who, as she sat upright in bed, was directly opposite the entrance, he needed to ask no questions concerning her.

As the strong-featured, grisly-haired man came in with his heavy tramp, and crossed the kitchen to the bedroom without apology and in silence, he seemed like some avenging champion. Margery and Angie trembled and shrank into corners, where they kept a sharp look-out, however, like two spies, as they were. Hannah's features were strained mean-

while with an intense expression of eagerness and expectation, the sharp lines of which settled into a fixed defiant despair as she heard his loud, grave, "Wal, Hannah!" and saw, in the solemn vibrating of his head from side to side, a negation and rebuke to hope. It is doubtful with what blunt word of conviction he might have proceeded to fulfil his errand (for Van Hausen was not a man of eloquence or circumlocution, and always took the shortest way to the truth), but Hannah saved him even that trouble; she had read the verdict in his face.

"Wal, Dick," she immediately responded, "they've done fur my old man!"

"That's a fact," blurted Dick, "they have."

"Have you been on the mountain?"

"Not yet I hain't, but I've seen them as has. Stein's folks was among the fust roused. I met 'em jest the other side o' here. I only looked in to make sure you warn't murdered yerself, and to break the wust to yer. I'm on my way up now."

"The sooner the better," said Hannah; "the only comfort to me is to know that folks is on the track o' the murderers. Don't let 'em leave a stone unturned, Dick. Offer a reward, and get them fellers up from York as knows how to ferrut out things. It's most likely 'twas murder fust and stealin' arterwards; so I don't doubt they've robbed my old man's strong-box, but there's money enough left to bring 'em to justice, I reckon, and I'll spend every farthing on't but what I'll see 'em swing."

"I'll back you up in that, Hannah," said Dick, with energy. "If any man thinks he can beat another's brains out an' not suffer for't, we'll let him know to the contrary."

"I've got a clue a'ready," boasted Hannah, holding up the mitten, and shaking it before the eyes of her audience. "Find the hand that this 'ere'll fit, Dick, an' you'll find the hand that dealt a death-blow."

"Dun' no 'bout that!" said Dick, as he took the mitten and handled it with interest. "Common 'nuf mitten that, an'

wud fit most anybody. If we could come across the mate though, 't might be worth while. Hold on to it anyway. There's no knowin' how it may tell with a jury one o' these days. Smaller things than that ha' hung a man. My soul, gal!" continued he, suddenly addressing Angie, who had gradually crept close to his elbow, and whose agitation for the first time attracted his notice. "How shaky you are on yer underpinnin', an' yer face hain't got no more colour than a white pine-board. Don't be afeared, child! We'll catch the fellers, an' have 'em in the lock-up 'fore this world's many days older. Anyhow, they won't ventur' into these parts agin in a hurry, arter the stroke o' business they did last night. But here I am losin' time a'ready. I must be off up the mountain. Geordie's got the start o' me, I'll warrant, Mis' Rawle. I'm sorry for't. There's nothin' like havin' good company on a bad arrant. Hollo! What's the matter wi' the woman?" (Margery was clinging to one of the bed-posts, and shaking like an aspen-leaf.) "Scar't to death, ain't she! Wal, Lord ha' mercy on us! it's enough to scare strong folks, let alone the like o' her. Take care on her. Take care o' both on 'em, young ooman, an' you keep up yer pluck, Hannah. I'll come back an' bring Geordie with me when we've got through our sarch."

He turned to go. With a strong effort at self-command, Angie followed him. "George isn't about home, Mr. Van Hausen," she found voice to utter.

"George away! Don't say so," muttered Van Hausen, in evident regret, not to say vexation.

"Yes! We don't expect him back at present," ventured Angie; then added, in a hesitating tone, "he and I have quarrelled."

"You have, have yer?" exclaimed Van Hausen, wrathfully. "Hang these women!" he muttered, "they're allers at the bottom of all the mischief! Then let me tell yer," he added, to Angie, who looked wretched and penitent enough just then to have spared the rebuke, "that you've done about the misfortinest thing that ever you was up ter. If ever

Geordie was wanted in this world it's now, when you've sent him a flyin' off the handle. Jest like yer, you little —"

Here Van Hausen, at a loss to find a sufficiently contemptuous term, grasped the shoulder of the unresisting girl by way of emphasis. He would not have hurt her for the world; still, nervous and conscious-stricken, she trembled beneath the touch of his great hand.

"Them Steins 'll be forrard enough in this 'ere business, I'll warrant," continued Van Hausen, in a sort of muttered growl; "and what's to hinder? Geordie's the only other chip o' the old stock, an' he's off for Virginny by this time, like enough! The boy's been kind o' sore agin his uncle Baultie o' late; but he'll take a back track when he larns what a cruel end the old man's come ter."

Van Hausen was soliloquizing, so he never heeded the fact that there was no response to his words on Angie's part; but while she stood stunned and torpid, like a mouse just released from a lion's grip, he turned away, and went ploughing through the snow, continuing to mutter to himself as he went.

CHAPTER XI.

Battling with Fate.

Does Margery know? It is not easy to judge. That "scar't" look seemed to convict her of participation in the dreadful secret; but on the other hand, after Van Hausen had gone, she became composed, and even went about her common household duties. Not once did Angie, who was keenly observant, catch her eye, — not one syllable of information did she glean from her lips. Mute and downcast, she groped about the kitchen hearth, the woodshed, or her son's attic chamber; not a glance of curiosity, not an exclamation of alarm escaping her, — stranger still, not a murmur, not even a sigh. Silence had set its seal upon her, and a stone statue could not have been more non-committal.

Was this prudence or stupor, the stoicism of resolve, or the reaction after a night of excitement? It might have been either.

The storm had cleared, and the Christmas sun was shining brightly in at the cottage-windows; but it could not relieve the mystery, light up the darkness, heal the pain which the night had left to mock the day. The glistening snow had mantled the earth in a holiday dress for happy eyes to gaze upon; but horror-struck faces grew paler yet as they caught sight of Nature lying stiff and still under her cold death-robe. So, too, on the mountain-top, where guilty Night had witnessed a deed of blood, innocent Day was powerless to atone for the crime. Something, however, she could and did betray.

An old man dead, a strong-box empty, a peaceful homestead transformed into a deserted tomb! Night and its accomplices had fled together; but morning revealed the open window through which murder entered, the rope with which she bound her victim, the disorder which attested the struggle, — the very instrument of the crime.

And without the house, too, the pure snow, which elsewhere veiled all earth's disfigurements and hid her stains, furnished a written record, which he who ran might read. Heaven had checked her storm just in season to secure the evidence, and had sent out her frost to stereotype it.

The distinct tracts of sleigh-runners, from the foot of the mountain to the very door-stone of the dwelling, afforded a double line of testimony as to the route and mode of travel pursued by the murderers, both in going and returning, and the clumsy boot of the individual who had reconnoitred the house, and found access at the window, had left its impression at every step. Nor was a link wanting between the proof afforded within doors and without. Deep as was the snow, it was easy to discern traces of an accident and delay which the party, bound upon their cruel errand, had encountered about half-way up the mountain. At this point their vehicle had evidently been disabled, and further progress impeded by the

breakage of one of the sleigh-runners; thence-forward, and on the return track, one side of the sleigh had been more depressed than the other; and while one runner had marked a smooth furrow, the other had ploughed roughly through the snow. To corroborate the suspicions to which this circumstance gave rise, the only instrument of violence found upon the premises was this same iron-runner, which lay near the head of the fallen Baultie, at whose temples it had no doubt dealt the bloodless but fatal blow.

"And is this all?" asked Hannah, when Van Hausen, who returned just before noon, had reported the above as the result of a diligent search on the part of an excited neighbourhood.

"Why, yes," said Van Hausen, speaking loud and close to her ear, "that's about the long an' the short on it, as fur's I can make out."

"What! no stabs on the body; no clothes o' theirs stained with blood; no knives nor nothin'?" questioned Hannah, with a sort of savage disappointment.

"No; they shaved their work off smooth, and made a neat job on it. I'll say that fur 'em," bawled Dick, his habitual respect for a skilful workman giving to his tone, as well as to his words, the effect of a complimentary tribute.

"The cunning knaves!" cried Hannah. "With the evil one hisself backin' 'em up no wonder they did their work thorough. Still I was a hopin' you'd ha' found somethin' with a mark on't, Dick, — a handkercher, or a jack-knife, maybe; somethin' that might help yer to foller 'em up."

"Law, now, do hear the woman!" began Dick, in his usual tone; then elevating his voice he continued, "Why, you don't s'pose, do yer, that folks in their line o' business leave their names behind 'em when they call, or send yer word where you'll find 'em agin at short notice?"

"I ain't a fool, Dick!" retorted Hannah, hotly; "but this much I know for sartain — them as sarves the Almighty has luck on their side; them as follers the lead o' the old serpent may wriggle about a long while, but they never travel so fast

nor so fur but that their evil desarts will come up wi' 'em some day. May the Lord that rules in heaven hasten on that day of justice, and may I live to see it! — that's my prayer," she added, in a tone in which revenge and supplication were strangely mingled.

"That's a nat'ral wish," said Van Hausen, "I say amen to it; and you too, Mis' Rawle, don't yer?" and he turned suddenly in the direction where Margery, who had followed him into the bedroom, stood just within the doorway. She was wiping a dish at her sink when Van Hausen re-entered the house — the same dish which she had vacantly washed and wiped several times during the morning. Standing with it half-wrapped in the dish-towel, she had clung convulsively to it while listening to the tidings which Dick brought; but at his abrupt question, it dropped to the floor and was broken to pieces.

"Lord bless the woman, and save the crockery!" ejaculated Van Hausen.

Angie, who, stationed within hearing, had also been drinking in the news, darted forward and busied herself in collecting the fragments.

"The jiltin' hussy, what business has she here?" grunted Dick, as he looked down with disdain at the poor girl thus humbly occupied at his feet. Angie's ear did not catch the exact purport of his words, but the epithet bestowed on her was intelligible enough, and she retreated instinctively from his vicinity.

"Margery!" now exclaimed Hannah, reprovingly, from her bed, "you're weak! Go an' set down. You ain't fit to stand about. Anybody 'd think 'twas her, an' not me, that had got a blow!" she added, with stoical self-complacency.

Margery, meek and dumb, crept away to her straight-backed chair in the kitchen chimney-corner, sat down, clasped her hands, and gazed into the fire. Angie moved off in the direction of the woodshed, with the broken crockery in her apron. Hannah Rawle and Van Hausen, left alone, held a short conversation, during which the former gave some direc-

tions concerning the final disposition of her husband's body, leaving it to her brother to make such arrangements as he thought proper for the coroner's inquest. She herself would remain where she was, she said; a resolve which her condition perhaps rendered inevitable, but which she, at all events, arrived at independently of any consultation with Margery.

These points being settled, and reiterated charges being given to Van Hausen to spare no efforts for the discovery and apprehension of the murderers, he again left the house to pursue his investigations and otherwise act in his sister's behalf.

"I think I'll go, now?" said Angie, in an interrogative tone, to Margery; and she put on her hood and commenced tying it.

Margery answered by casting a shrinking glance towards the bed-room, as if she feared being left alone with its inmate; at the same time clinging to Angie's hand, which she caught and held tight, veiling the action, however, beneath the folds of a shawl that hung over the girl's arm.

"I'll come back, by-and-by," whispered Angie, at once putting a right interpretation upon the look and gesture.

Margery, satisfied with this promise, released her hold; and Angie hastened home to dine with her father, or at least sit down with him to the Christmas dinner, which she knew both he and Happy would be disappointed if she were not there to share.

It was a hard ordeal for Angie. The volatile little Frenchman was greatly excited by the events of the morning. With an instinctive dread of participating in any painful scene, he had confined his neighbourly duties to rousing others and despatching them up the mountain; but he had nevertheless waylaid each party on their return, and had possessed himself of all the information they brought. He now talked volubly, speculated wildly, and plied Angie with questions, each one of which was to her an instrument of torture. The tough fowl, the last of his race, which — like Mr. Cousin's other experiments in farming — had never thriven, was larded and inter-

larded with the melancholy particulars which Mr. Cousin had gleaned; and Happy's pastry was seasoned with such minute details as could be extracted from Angie concerning the circumstances that had transpired at the cottage — subjects little favourable to Christmas cheer under any circumstances! To Angie a wretched foretaste of what fate had in store for her. Burdened as she was with a weight of suffering, sin, and secresy, she realized how hopeless would be any attempt to hide or flee from the poisoned shafts which the curiosity, the malice, and the gossip of the neighbourhood would hourly inflict.

Fortunately for her, no degree of agitation was a matter of surprise in a community where all were excited by rumours, fears, and exaggerations; and for the inward pain, *that* had so fastened its fang upon her, that, struggle as she might, it would not yield its prey; and, so that she had strength given her not to betray, she was nerved to endure. And nobody suspected her, and she bore up — how, they may ask who have only seen phantom miseries in the dim perspective; how, let them answer who have proved the monsters real, and survived the shock. Men and women speculate on imaginary woes — realities they live through — let each one answer how; let all believe that “as our day so shall our strength be.”

It was towards dusk, when Angie once more prepared to make her way through the snow-drifts to Margery's cottage. Mr. Cousin, early broken of his rest, and wearied with the excitements of the day, had fallen asleep in his arm-chair, and Angie, before leaving, took the precaution to inform Happy that unless she came home before dark, it might be taken for granted that she meant to spend the night at Mrs. Rawle's. As she crossed the fields and approached the cottage from a quarter opposite the road, she was surprised at the light which streamed from the back window of the kitchen. As she drew nearer, she discovered it to proceed from a brighter fire than she had ever before beheld in the fireplace of the prudent Margery, and, stranger still, the old woman herself might be seen bending over her hearth, one arm

heavily laden with fuel, which, with the other, she was rapidly heaping on the fire.

Are those short fagots green or water-soaked, that they smoulder and smoke so? And why does Margery now and then plunge her hand into a basket beside her, and fling on heaps of shavings, chips, and other combustible matter, to increase the blaze? Is this a time and place for lighting Christmas fires and burning yule logs?

Such were the questions which Angie asked herself as she drew near the window, pressed her face against its frosty panes, and followed Margery's motions with an observant eye. Whether it was anxiety, fear, or simply curiosity which impelled Angie's scrutiny, the result was apparently decisive, for, after a few minutes of earnest watching, she withdrew a few steps from the window, and quietly waited until Margery's supply of fuel was exhausted. She then entered the house at the woodshed door, though not without first shaking the snow from her feet, rattling the lock, and otherwise giving indications of her approach. Notwithstanding these precautions, she found Margery trembling from head to foot, and wearing the frightened look of one detected in a crime.

"Did I startle you? Never mind me — I'm alone;" said Angie, soothingly, while Margery sank into a chair, speechless.

"You've got a good fire," said Angie, with an attempt at her usual cheerful ease. "I'm glad of it, for I'm cold and damp;" and throwing her shawl over the back of a chair, and placing herself in a low seat in the chimney-corner, she continued, pointing to the bedroom, — "Is she asleep?"

Margery nodded in the affirmative; then, either restless or fearful of being further questioned, she rose up suddenly, and making a pretext of her chip-basket, the same which George had filled the night before, and which she had now emptied, went out with it into the shed, where she could be heard fumbling at the wood-pile. If Angie had a doubt regarding the nature of Margery's recent employment, here

was an opportunity of solving it. Just above her head was the press in which the widow's stock of valuables was for the most part garnered up. Angie knew the corner in which the products of her industry were invariably stowed. It was but to pull out a drawer, plunge in a hand, and certify oneself of its present condition. It was done — the drawer was empty. Add to this the smell of burning wool which loaded the atmosphere, and there could be no doubt that the fruits of Margery's skill and economy in carding, spinning, and dyeing had been ruthlessly sacrificed on the altar of secrecy; that the poor mother had been eagerly feeding the flames with all that remained of those brown, hard-twisted skeins of home-spun yarn, of which her son's knitted mittens had been the first and the only manufacture.

Scarcely had Angie's suspicion, however, the time to flash into certainty; scarcely had the brass drawer handle ceased to click against its metallic plate as the drawer flew back into its place, when the front door of the cottage opened and a visitor entered. It was Diedrich Stein. Coming as he did from the direction of the road, and passing only a window whose shutter was closed and barred, Stein had not enjoyed the same opportunity that Angie had of surveying the premises before entering. His keen senses, however, being always on the alert, it was not surprising that he came in with the air of one who snuffed mischief.

"Good evening, Mr. Stein!" said Angie, facing about briskly, and at the same time with a carelessness (if it were carelessness) very unusual to her, contriving to push the chair, over which her shawl hung, nearly into the fire. "It is a cold evening, sir; take a seat."

"I hope I see you well to-night, Miss Angie," said the dingy little brown man, bowing low; "pretty well — that is — of course — considering" — with a series of pauses which were intended, like his words, to qualify the possibility of rude health under the present depressing circumstances; then stopping short, and with his nose elevated, "don't I smell something? Margery, woman, what's burning?" turning

towards Margery, who was coming in at the moment he put the question.

Margery, terrified alike by her brother's presence and his question, looked distractedly wild; but Angie had already provided for this emergency, and was sufficient for the occasion.

"Oh, my shawl! it is all on fire!" was the girl's quick response to Stein's query; and darting forward, she snatched from the embers one end of the woollen shawl, which, truly enough, was dangling where Angie had purposely thrust it, just over the bed of coals, — a second burnt-offering laid on that fiery altar, — and no vain one either, for as Hannah, wakened by the sound of voices, now started up with the cry, "You're all a-fire!" Angie, zealously smothering the flames, was able to satisfy her also with the assurance — "My shawl's been on fire, ma'am, but I've put it out — it's of no consequence."

"No consequence!" retorted Hannah, sharply. "My stars, what are these young folks a-comin' to, with their carelessness, I wonder! They'd burn the house down over yer head, and then say it was no consequence!"

"New shawls don't grow on every bush," remarked Stein, sententiously.

Harsh rebukes these for Angie; she, so used to flattery, was getting blamed on all sides to-day. But such blame was praise to her ears. It proved the success of her *ruse*, and protected the achievement of Margery. These two women were fighting together against fate, and keeping despair at bay. Like drowning men battling for life with the waves, they little heeded the comments of spectators on the shore.

Stein's visit was one of condolence; so, this little alarm over, he proceeded at once to business. Stein had a face for such occasions, as well as for those of a convivial character. Not that the landlord's features were naturally mobile, or that a quick alternation of emotions in him had power to transform the outer man. But he was like one of those comic pictures whose harsh outline, presenting in one view a visage

on the broad grin, needs only to be reversed to display a countenance grim as midnight or hopelessly woe-begone. Thus Stein, giving his features a sudden wrench, was able at pleasure to assume his humorous mask, his mask of severity, or his sable mask, — and it was the last-named disguise which he now wore.

His voice, too, was capable of modulations corresponding to the part he had to play. Cracked and squeaking by nature, it could never possess the music of mirth, nor draw from the deep wells of pathos or tragedy; but he had a smart, brisk tongue for flattery, a harsh, stinging lash with the same member for the correction of offenders, and a subdued twang for the benefit of all objects of commiseration. Thus, with a mouth well drawn down at the corners, and stepping on tiptoe, he ventured to insert his head within the bedroom door and to drawl out, — “Mis’ Rawle, I jest looked in to see how you find yourself to-night — tolerable, I hope — considering!”

Hannah, who had an instinctive distrust of Stein, and who, either from infirmity or obstinacy, was always more than ordinarily deaf to his words, answered him only with a stare of irritation. He was obliged to repeat his remark in a louder key, robbing it thereby of much of its significance.

“Oh, I’m well enough!” answered Hannah, curtly.

“Can I do anything for you?” asked Stein; keeping his voice up to the required pitch.

“You? No.”

“This is a sad piece o’ business, Mis’ Rawle.”

“Yes, sad for some.”

“Sad for all, ma’am; your husband was a thrifty man, universally respected.”

“So much the wuss for them that’s lost him; so much the better for them that steps into his shoes.”

“I’ve lost a most excellent friend in Baultie Rawle,” said Stein, adroitly appropriating to himself the portion of Hannah’s remark least intended to include him. “The rogues

that took his life, took what'll never be made up to me in this world."

"They've broken up the money-chest, I hear, and carried off the best part o' my old man's savin's; that's bad for the heirs, sartin," remarked Hannah, who was not to be outdone by Stein in putting whatever interpretation she chose upon another's words.

"The gold is nothing, ma'am," said Stein, persevering in his hypocritical show of disinterestedness; "besides, that may be recovered, but there is no bringing back the dead."

"Let them that is consarned, foller up the gold," responded Hannah. "They can't do a better sarvice to Baultie nor me than to keep on the track o' them villains, whether it be for love or money."

"You may depend on my best sarvices," said Diedrich, with an air of devotion.

"Very well," said Hannah, "I'm glad on't. 'Set a thief to ketch a thief' is an old sayin', and a wise one," she further muttered; and she turned over on her pillow, as if to put an end to the dialogue, quite unconscious that she muttered audibly.

Stein heard and winced a little, but as Margery and Angie were at too great a distance to have heard also, he prudently forbore taking any notice of the insinuation.

"If you're afraid to stay here alone to-night," he continued, still feigning the part of a protecting friend, "I'll send a man up from the tavern."

"A man! what fur?" exclaimed Hannah. "We don't want no man. I reckon two old women, without a cent in the world, are safe enough. I'd like to know what 'arthly use a man 'ud be?"

"Oh, you're safe enough, I'll venture to say," said Stein, as he turned to leave the room. "I was only thinking," he went on by way of explanation to Angie, to whom, re-entering the kitchen, he now addressed himself, "that they might naturally feel a little lonely and shaky-like after last night;

but Mis' Rawle's got uncommon stout nerves, so between 'em I reckon they'll do, especially with such excellent neighbours as they have at hand;" and Stein, dressed now in his mask of obsequiousness, bowed and took his hat. Always accustomed to count Margery a cipher, he would not probably have thought it necessary to address a remark to her at leaving, but happening to bethink himself of George, he turned just as he reached the door to say, with the tongue that knew how to lash, "Margery, it's a pity that boy of yours is away just now. It looks bad. Besides, he ought not to lose the chance to be of use for once in his life. If it hadn't been for Miss Angie here, I don't know what you'd have done for the want of him. But," turning to Angie, and lapsing into his complimentary vein, "one steady gal's worth a dozen wild lads, any day." Then in an insinuating whisper, "He isn't worthy of you, Miss Angie — never was; but there's a fine young fellow, of a considerable higher figure in life, that'll be glad enough to cut him out in the good graces of our New Jarsey belle, that we're all so proud of. You don't need me though to tell you of your conquests in that quarter, eh?" — and with a flourish of the hand that would have become a supernumerary in a low comedy, he went his way out of the house, chuckling at his own skill in trimming his sails according as the wind chanced to set, and attributing Angie's shamefaced looks to an affectation of modesty.

"Has that wolf in sheep's clothin' — that brother o' your'n — gone, Margery?" called Hannah, the moment she heard the bang of the outside door.

"Yes," was the humbly-spoken monosyllable in which Margery replied.

"Then rake up the fire and come to bed."

Margery looked imploringly at Angie.

"I'll stay and sleep with you," said the latter. "Never mind what she says; we'll bring down the bed from — from —" she could not speak his name, — "from the room overhead, and make it up on the floor; tell her so, tell her! She's calling."

Margery crept timidly into the bedroom, and, with some hesitation and difficulty, made known Angie's intention to spend the night at the cottage.

"What's that gal here agin fur!" was the next exclamation that reached Angie's ear. "Geordie ain't at home to be bejuggled by her tricks. What business has she to be danglin' round so?"

It was desirable to have Hannah's goodwill, since, owing to her deafness, her opinion of people was seldom disguised; and, pretend as we may to the contrary, if disagreeable things must be said of us, we all prefer to have them said behind our backs.

This was the last home-thrust, however, which Angie was to experience that night. As Margery did not attempt to defend her young neighbour's forwardness, Hannah, satisfied with having given vent to her disgust at the intrusion, lay quite still, and offered no further interference. It required but a few moments to carry out Angie's plan, and she and Margery were soon stretched side by side on their bed upon the kitchen floor. After awhile, Hannah, strong and, as Stein had said, sound of nerve slept as she meditated, audibly. The other two women spoke not, moved not — scarcely breathed; with eyes wide open, ears strained, limbs rigid, and hearts throbbing to one nameless fear, they watched and waited until the morning — each hoping, trusting that the other slept, and thus each, for the first time since the shock, left, as it were, alone with her anguish. We may not lift the veil which night had in mercy drawn over that pair of broken hearts.

CHAPTER XII.

Weighing the Testimony.

THE murder — its perpetrator — its motive — its manner of execution — its probable consequences; these, of course, constituted the nine days' wonder of Stein's Plains and the neighbouring district. Every ascertained detail of the affair, every reasonable supposition, every absurd conjecture, was discussed; and the tavern was naturally the nucleus of the county gossip, — the centre where rumour held her court, and whence all her emissaries radiated.

Stein was in high feather. Never, according to calculations of his made during the small hours of the night, when there was a temporary lull in the business, had anything brought so much money to his till as this murder. The Stein Races were the product of his fertile brain, and he appreciated the genius which had fathered and fostered such a lucrative institution; but murder was the devil's own invention, and never before had Stein fully realized the allegiance that he owed to the Prince of Darkness. Why, this one murder was worth to Stein, in hard cash, more than a dozen horse-races, more than twice that number of Christmas balls, more than the ordinary profits of a whole year.

The weather on the day succeeding the catastrophe was indeed unfavourable; for the air was sharp, the snow deep, the roads heavy. Still, on the other hand, it was Sunday and Christmas: the former fact giving the news an opportunity to circulate in the churches; the latter, taken in connection with the cold, making it reasonable to throng the public-house, and indulge in a holiday drink, flavoured with "the latest particulars." Then the coroner's inquest, which took place the following day, was a fresh excitement for the neighbourhood, and a rich harvest to the busy publican, who dined the jurymen, put up their horses, and threw open his doors to the thirsty crowd. Finally, the funeral, which it was happily

decided should, as a matter of convenience, take place at the tavern, rather than on the mountain, brought half the inhabitants of the county together, and might justly have been styled "The landlord's benefit."

Taking all these facts into account, reflecting on the vigorous constitution Baultie Rawle had possessed, and the risk there would have been of his outliving his brother-in-law, or making some capricious disposition of his property, Stein, as one of the legal heirs (through his wife, who was nobody), could not but congratulate himself that the loss of the golden guineas, on the night of the murder, was more than balanced by the timely death of the old man, and the singularly-felicitous circumstances attending his departure.

That Stein was satisfied, more than satisfied, with the compensation thus made to him, no one would doubt who could have seen him late at night, divested of the tragic mask worn religiously by day, complacently reviewing his cash-book, and rubbing his hands with glee as he surveyed the sum total derived from one week's custom.

That Stein, the covetous Stein, had thus mentally offset his losses by his gains, was proof enough of the hopelessness of the former. Stein would never have acknowledged the loss of anything, much less submitted to it, except as compelled by necessity. But, so far as any chance of recovering the guineas was concerned, the sum total of the week's revelations was less satisfactory than that of Stein's gains.

The evidence collected previous to the coroner's inquest resulted in the following verdict, — namely, "That Baltimore Rawle came to a violent death on the night of December 24th, 1812, owing to a blow on the right temple, inflicted by a portion of a broken sleigh-runner, through the agency of some person or persons unknown."

A most unsatisfactory verdict for an excited community! A most ungrateful one on the part of the coroner and his aids, considering the travelling expenses, the dinner at Stein's, the rum-punch, and the officer's fees — all at the county expense.

“Wal, I do vum! that’s all they’ve got to tell, is it? Any fool might ha’ known that much!” cried the indignant widow of the murdered man, on receiving the coroner’s report; and in this she only represented the sentiment of the community, who had laboured under the impression that twelve jurymen, imported from abroad and empowered to the solemn duty of sitting on a body, must necessarily be possessed of a species of divination.

The facts stated in the verdict were, indeed, meagre, compared with the rumours which were in circulation. They were unsatisfactory, too, compared with those which skilful detectives might reasonably have hoped to establish. Up to a certain point, the testimony regarding the crime was immediate and ample, but there the connecting thread was broken, and no trace of it could be discovered.

In addition to the evidence afforded by the impressions on the snow and within the house, the owner of the broken sleigh promptly appeared before the coroner’s jury, and testified to that portion of his property which had been converted into a deadly weapon. This individual, a respectable farmer named Boggs, residing beyond Stein’s Plains, on the high road to New York, further related that, on the evening previous to the murder, a stranger came to his door on foot from the direction of the city, and proposed hiring his horse and sleigh, for the purpose of continuing his journey to a town beyond the Plains, whither he said he had been summoned to visit a sick relative. In answer to the objection made on the part of the farmer, that his sleigh had been weakened the previous winter by a partial fracture of one of the runners, and was still needing repair, the man had begged to examine the vehicle, and had declared it, in his opinion, sufficiently trustworthy for the short journey he had in view. The farmer, who distrusted the man’s appearance, had then argued that his horse was equally incapacitated for travel, by the loss of one of his shoes; but this objection had also been overruled, partly by the assurance that the animal’s hoofs would not suffer from his being carefully driven over roads bedded with

fresh snow — but still more (as the farmer, who was a poor man, himself confessed) by the offer of two Spanish dollars on the spot, and a promise that horse and sleigh should be restored before noon of the following day. On these conditions, he had himself assisted the stranger, who had a stiff finger, in harnessing the old farm-horse, and had seen the man set off alone in the direction of Stein's Plains.

To corroborate this account and strengthen the chain of proof, a widow woman living in a solitary cottage on the road which ran over the mountain, and near the spot where marks in the snow indicated the accident to the sleigh, testified to the following facts: — On the night of the murder, being kept awake by a sick child, she had been startled, first by hearing a gruff voice outside, apparently addressed to a horse, and then by a violent knocking at her door. Upon her cautiously inquiring from her window as to the cause of the disturbance, the owner of the same voice called out loudly but civilly, to ask if she could furnish him with a rope with which to repair an injury to his sleigh. He was a benighted traveller, he said, suffering from the cold and storm, but compelled to continue his journey across the mountain with as much speed as possible, — making use of the same plea as that quoted by the farmer, a summons to the bedside of somebody who was ill. At first she thought she should be obliged to deny his request, not being conscious of possessing a rope in the world, except that which corded up the bedstead occupied by her invalid boy. But the boy, who had heard the dialogue and compassionated the traveller, happened to bethink himself of his sled, which was furnished with a strong, though knotted cord, by means of which it was suspended to the wall of a shed adjoining the house. The child generously offering it for the stranger's use, the mother admitted the traveller, led the way to the outer building where the sled hung, held the light, while he climbed a heap of brush and took it down from the nail, and herself helped him to attach the rope. She remembered this latter circumstance particularly, because the man had a sore finger, bound up with a

bit of rag, which made him, as she said, "kind o' awkward and clumsy like." Immediately upon obtaining what he had come to seek, the man hurried off. She could distinguish his voice for a moment or two, uttering oaths, which so alarmed her, she said, that she was glad when, through the darkness, she saw the vehicle move off, after which all was silence; nor, though kept awake during the greater part of the night by her child, did she hear the sleigh on its return. It might easily have passed down the mountain, however, unobserved by her, as the snow was by this time deep on the ground, and she was confident that there were no sleigh bells attached to the horse, — a point on which her evidence failed to correspond with that of Farmer Boggs, who had himself, he said, hung a chain of bells around his horse's neck. From first to last her impression had been that her visitor was a solitary traveller; she had heard no voice but his, and had no reason to suspect his having a companion.

When questioned whether she could identify the rope, she answered promptly in the affirmative, upon which the coroner, who was no such fool after all, ordered a bushel-basket full of ropes to be produced of various sizes and descriptions. Without hesitation, the woman selected the very piece of rope with which an attempt had evidently been made to bind Baultie Rawle.

The child, who had now recovered from his illness, being summoned, and subjected to the same ordeal, at once seized upon the same tangled and knotted piece of property, and with dreams of coasting in his little brain, insisted upon retaining it, crying lustily when this valuable link in the chain of evidence was taken from him by the coroner's order, nothing daunted by his mother's horrified warning, "Don't touch the bloody thing, Joey! hangin' the varmint is all it's fit fur now;" and only consoled by a silver shilling, which Van Hausen slipped into his hand.

What could be more clear than the evidence of such unsophisticated witnesses? It only remained now to overtake, identify, and hang the murderer, — processes which seemed

so feasible under the promising state of the case, that the more ardent portion of the community began almost to speculate whether the character of this domestic tragedy were not such as to justify Lynch law and immediate execution.

Great, therefore, was the disposition to charge the coroner with lukewarmness, when he gravely alluded to the mystery which still overhung the case; and distrust, amounting to suspicion of connivance at crime, at once attached itself to a city-constable, who, as he stalked among the rustic crowd, was heard to say, "Pshaw! your evidence ain't worth that!" snapping his fingers contemptuously in the air.

It was only when time had cooled their ardour, and successive disappointments checked their zeal, that the people of Stein's Plains could be brought to acknowledge what was palpable to less unsophisticated minds — namely, that clear as might be the track of Farmer Boggs's sleigh, it availed nothing unless, being followed up, it led to some further discovery; and that although Farmer Boggs and the widow might be haunted to their dying day with the certainty of having seen a murderer face to face, their conviction on this point was of no benefit to society, unless it could be instrumental in bringing the criminal to justice: and on both these points the evidence was greatly at fault.

The trail of the broken sleigh-runner, after being traced for some miles, gradually melted into those of the numerous vehicles which, by daylight, were moving in the direction of New York. Even at the ferry, where it was hoped a door might have been left open for detection, due precaution had been observed, for a little short of this point the sleigh had been deserted of its occupant, who had doubtless, thence made his way to New York on foot, and without exciting observation. Even these facts did not come to light immediately; but at length a public notice being served, that a horse without a shoe, and attached to a broken sleigh, had strayed into Hoboken, where both might be found at a locality named in the advertisement, and restored to the owner on payment of

charges, Farmer Boggs, accompanied by a constable of the district, and attended by a little throng of satellites, hastened to the place indicated, recognized and reclaimed his property.

The old horse proved to be in an exhausted condition, as if abused and overdriven; his broken shoe was dangling from his hoof, and its sharp edge, by continually galling the opposite leg, had caused such a bruise and consequent swelling, that the poor brute limped in a pitiable manner. The injury to the sleigh proved, to the great satisfaction of a gaping crowd, exactly to correspond with the breakage indicated by the fractional part of the runner found in Baultie Rawle's cottage, with the additional circumstance that every part of the vehicle was shattered and strained, as might have been anticipated, from the hard usage to which it had been subjected in its maimed condition. Except that the sleigh bells were found carefully stowed away under the seat, there was nothing further to indicate the purpose to which it had recently been applied, the character of its occupant, nor the quarter in which he had taken refuge. If, however, the witnesses could furnish a life-like description of the individual who was known to have been abroad on the night of the catastrophe, he might yet, it was believed, be traced, detected, and brought to trial. But when these witnesses were required to furnish a portrait of the man, their testimony was chiefly remarkable for its discrepancy.

Not that their accounts were so contradictory as to create doubts regarding the identity of the person who had hired the farmer's sleigh, with him who had paid the widow a midnight visit. On the contrary, there were a few points on which they were sufficiently well agreed to establish this fact — his gruff voice, his profanity, pertinacity, and his finger bent nearly double, and protected by a dirty rag — the third finger of the right hand — sworn to with exactness by both parties. But when it was proposed to placard a description of his person, the witnesses were sadly at variance. Let any two persons (excitement apart) undertake to furnish the details of a man's

personal appearance, and there is generally but little harmony in the colouring. It was unfortunate then, but scarcely strange, that the more the witnesses strove to be graphic, the more blurred and confused was the sketch they mutually drew.

The one thought him dark-complexioned, — the other light; one pronounced him long-favoured, — the other declared his face to have been round and ruddy. "He was about as tall as So-and-so," was the impression of one. "No, taller by half a head," was the conviction of the other. And as each illustrated his or her recollections by comparison with one or another of their neighbours, they contrived between them to draw a picture of a most motley man. Farmer Boggs had thought him ill-favoured in the beginning, but, conciliated before the close of the interview (doubtless by means of the two dollars), had ended in retracting his first judgment and trusting to the man's honest countenance.

The widow, on the other hand, had evidently mistaken him at first for a benevolent individual, possibly a physician, on his way, as he assured her, to visit the sick. Doubts on this point had probably arisen in her mind when she overheard his profane abuse of his horse; but the horror of his ferocious countenance which she professed on examination, must have been the after-growth of her imagination.

Little Joey had his word, too, in regard to the identification of the stranger — a circumstance which did not help to clear up the mystery, since he insisted that the visitor, whom he had seen striding through his sick room at midnight, bore a close resemblance to good old Dominie Van Zandt — the only other person among Joey's acquaintance of whom the boy stood in awe.

Of course every word that dropped from the mouths of these three personages, elevated as they were into sudden importance, went the rounds of the parish, and gave rise to all sorts of surmises.

One man would not have wished to be pointed out, like Sam the butcher, as being just the height of the murderer;

another was glad he had not Joel Beck's round, ruddy face, for that would be suspected next. One old woman shook her head, and thought all the doctors round had better be looking out; and another whispered to a crony of hers, in the church-porch on Sunday, after the sermon, that the dominie *did* have a threatening look in his face when he preached hard doctrine, and laid down his finger in a terrible way when he meant somethin' should strike home. If she hadn't always supposed he was such a good man, she should think he was one o' the sort that might do anything he had made up his mind to.

As to the sore finger — the most telling and tallying point in the evidence — that was dwelt upon at great length in the parish. Everybody's brains were racked to recall everybody's else ailments in that quarter. Several persons were named who had suffered from whitlows and chilblains; but it was in every instance called to mind that they had been healed for a year or more. The blacksmith's clumsy apprentice, who was jamming and bruising his fingers daily, was suddenly brought into prominent notice, and the question was mooted whether the boy, generally considered underwitted, might not have disguised himself, and taken part in the tragedy! but an *alibi* being at once proved by the lad's friends, he was acquitted triumphantly.

Only one eye in the parish had prescience of a wounded finger, bound with a dirty rag, which criminated its owner. Only one ear that heard the report of the solitary fact on which the witnesses were agreed, was struck with a truth that carried with it instant conviction. But Angie had felt the truth before. To know it now was but to make "assurance doubly sure:" and she kept her own counsel.

The city detectives, relying little on the inconsistent evidence afforded by rustic testimony, still hoped to trace the villains by means of the golden guineas, the silver coin, or the notes and other papers, the property of Baultie Rawle, which had been rifled from the money-box. But their early and active efforts to win the reward promised by the heirs for

the recovery of the valuables, were unavailing; and as there was every reason to believe that these efforts would relax in proportion as time diminished the chances of success, the prospect of the villain's detection grew daily more discouraging.

It was the general opinion, judging from the testimony of the witnesses, and the identity of the foot-print left in the snow, that there had been but one agent in the murder; and this in spite of the protestations of Hannah Rawle, who persisted that there were two or more men engaged in the struggle. "Don't they s'pose, the fools, that if there hadn't been more 'n one, me an' my old man could ha' handled him?" was Hannah's spirited refutation of the possibility suggested by those who had weighed the evidence, and decided adversely to her in the matter. Nobody could positively contradict her on this point. Indeed, in her presence nobody dared to, for nothing so kindled her temper or excited her animosity; but the very individual who had apparently been convinced by her argument, would shake his head when out of her sight, and say, "The old hen's crop is full o' grit, but one strong man could ha' settled that tough pair o' fowls easy enough, catchin' 'em as he did arter they'd gone to roost. Why, the wretch tied the old man fust, you see, and it was easy enough then to silence him, and send the old wife flyin'. It was the blackest kind o' darkness, and she deaf as a post. What does she know how many hawks pounced on her nest? One could break it up as well as a dozen!"

The fact that Stein's tavern and the Christmas races brought many a foul bird of prey into the neighbourhood at this season, left a wide field open for speculation. Let the country people discuss the question as they might among themselves, and cast trembling glances at one another; let them indulge in vain surmises concerning respectable individuals, or hint vaguely at the war with Great Britain as the exciting cause of this act of violence, the burden of suspicion always rested finally on the crowd of gamblers,

horse-jockeys, and thieves, which it was well known that the city belched forth on occasions of festivities at the tavern. These men were but little known to the rustics. Herding as they did together, they seldom, save in single instances and for temporary purposes, held any communication with the members of the rural community, except in the case of young men who, like Geordie, had a horse on the course, and then the intercourse grew so naturally out of circumstances, that it failed to attract special attention. Indeed, the people of the plains, so far from seeking to avoid the imputation of having any knowledge of these city gaol-birds, as they now thought proper to term them, had each some special rogue, swindler, horse-jockey, or passer of counterfeit money, whom he declared he knew root and branch, knew to his sorrow, and whom he would be glad to see swing for this offence.

On the whole, the races fell into greater disrepute than ever, and Stein, although insinuating his doubts whether the races or their frequenters had anything to answer for in respect to the murder, professed himself satisfied that limits must be put to the popularity of his house, and that its reputation being well established, it would be polite in him to raise his charges, and thus make it more select.

Once, indeed, Stein made an endeavour to clear his premises from suspicion, and implicate one, otherwise unthought of and unnamed, in such a connection. Of all the persons who had witnessed the stormy interview between George and Baultie Rawle, Stein was the only one, both able and disposed, to give evidence. Even he so realized the terrible nature of the charge, and the obloquy to which it might expose him, that he began by breaking the matter cautiously to Van Hausen, — and here he ended.

“Say that agin,” cried Van Hausen, “and I’ll knock every one of yer teeth down yur throat fur yer, you black villain, you!” shaking his fist at the landlord, who, physically an arrant coward, was already quaking and repentant. “Accuse yer own nephew of a crime like that?”

Look at home fur crimes, I tell yer!" and the whole current of Van Hausen's wrath let loose, he now poured out upon the sneaking wretch such a stream of accusations and threats as effectually warned Stein of his own damaged character, and the certainty of a merciless rooting up of much that would not bear the light; possibly a retaliatory charge on the matter of the murder itself, should he ever again dare to whisper his innuendoes concerning George to any human ear; and Stein knew Van Hausen and his own interests too well ever to repeat the experiment.

As time passed on, and the surmises which had been raised concerning an event that had startled the neighbourhood acquired a more vague, hopeless, and indefinite character, the Rawle tragedy came to be thought of less as a murder than a mystery. Had the perpetrator been discovered and atonement made, the ghost of the murdered Baultie might have been laid at rest, and visions of cruel men, holding up fingers bound with bloody rags, might have ceased to haunt the imagination of the neighbours. As it was, the subject, though no longer of engrossing interest, was never wholly exhausted. It invariably rose as the shadows of night fell. Groups of men rehearsed it on stormy evenings in the tavern bar-room; women, with their heads close together, whispered its grim details to one another at the fireside; children trembled in their beds, and heard strange noises in the dark; and as the chill wintry wind swept from the mountain across the plains, old and young shivered and shuddered as they remembered Baultie Rawle.

CHAPTER XIII.

Polly Defiant and Polly Subdued.

THE second day after the murder of Baultie Rawle, his niece, Polly Stein, came to see her aunt Hannah — not of her own accord, but sent by Stein, who, like most selfish men, loved his own children, and never failed to push them on to what he considered their advantage. So, having paid a visit of etiquette himself, he now despatched Polly on a similar errand. He would have done much better to keep her at home, for it was by no means an occasion on which she was calculated to shine. With sensibilities and nerves alike unmoved by the death of her stern old uncle, the reluctance with which she paid the visit was only equalled by the unbecomingness of her behaviour. She swung into the house abruptly, and, with a noisy flourish, slammed the back door by which she had entered; then spying Angie at the pantry cupboard, engaged in skimming a pan of milk, she wholly neglected or forgot the original object of her visit, and planting herself at Angie's elbow, began to watch, question, and tease her.

"Law, Angie Cousin, you here? They've set you to work, too, haven't they? My! I wouldn't work when I was visiting; it's bad enough to have to work at home. 'Tain't much fun staying here though, any way, is it? especially when Geordie's off the hooks? They say you and he have had a fuss. I s'ppose he's kind of touchy about the cap'n's having turned your head so. I declare, though, ain't the cap'n a smasher? My! how I do miss him!"

"Where is he?" asked Angie, with undisguised indifference.

"Oh, as if you didn't know or care!" cried Polly, with a loud, incredulous laugh.

"I don't."

"Then s'pose I don't tell you?"

"Just as you like."

Upon this Polly feigned to make a great secret of the matter; but after taking innumerable airs, and twitting Angie awhile with her saucy tongue, she could not resist the desire to display her own superior knowledge of the captain's movements, and so it came out at length that he had gone, on the morning of Sunday (Christmas-day) to the city, where he was engaged, as he had himself told Polly, to a grand dinner party, at a fine house on the Battery, — the owner being an old gentleman of Tory prejudices, and a friend of some connection of the captain's in London.

"Oh, the cap'n keeps grand company, I can tell you!" concluded Polly, tossing her head complacently.

"That don't promise very well for his country acquaintances," remarked Angie, drily.

"Oh! you think so, do you?" responded Polly, with a confident, cackling laugh. "I reckon it's first-rate for them that has a chance to be introduced to the city folks one o'these days."

Angie's astonishment, not to say disgust, at this remark was such, that she ceased skimming the milk — a process which Polly's entrance and conversation had marred, but not hitherto interrupted — and turning her head, gave Polly an earnest look, as if she were scrutinizing her thoughts. "You expect him back, then?" she said gravely, as she turned away.

"I should rather think I did," said Polly. "I guess he won't go off for good and all without bidding *me* good-by, however he may do with other folks;" and Polly's shrill voice now was full of triumph, as if she were gloating over a store of reserved hopes, — very pleasant to dwell upon, but too secret to be confided to any one.

A voice from the kitchen here called out, "Polly! Polly Stein! is that 'ere you I hear laughin'?"

Polly, checking her laughter as suddenly as if she had been strangled, now whispered to Angie in a frightened tone,

"Is aunt Hannah in there? Is she sittin' up and dressed? Has she heard me, do you s'pose?"

"She's up," replied Angie, "and sitting by the kitchen fire. Yes, she's heard you; she's calling your name," — for Hannah was still calling, and calling angrily.

Polly, ashamed to show herself, but afraid to hold back any longer, now sneaked in at the kitchen door.

"What are you doin' here, makin' such an uproar?" was Hannah's salutation to her niece. "You must be feelin' lively, when you can't keep your silly cacklin' from startlin' my old ears."

"I didn't come to please myself — father sent me," was the pert reply.

"Wal, you'd ha' been wiser to stay away from the house o' mournin', if you don't know any better how to behave in it."

Polly here resorted to biting her finger nail and looking sulky.

"How's your mother? She's more likely than any on you to be consarned about what's happened to yer uncle Baultie; why don't she come and see me?"

"She's awful busy; she's over head and ears in work."

"Why ain't you helpin' her, then?"

"I've been standing round all the morning; I'm tired;" and Polly sank heavily into a chair.

"Oh, young folks is easily tired nowadays. In my time the gals worked all day, and the mothers took a spell o' rest once in awhile. I'll warrant you'll never make yer mother's place good."

"I never mean to slave myself to death in a tavern kitchen," responded Polly, in a saucy, presuming tone. "I wouldn't be mistress of a tavern, anyway."

"Take care you never fall below that 'ere, or any other honest business," said Hannah Rawle, reprovingly. "I'll promise yer yer'll never rise any higher than your mother." Then added, in that undertone of hers, which was as usual perfectly intelligible to the hearer, "She's wurth a dozen on yer, any day, — yer lazy jade!"

Polly answered only by cocking her head on one side, curling her thin lip defiantly, and giving the floor a succession of complacent taps with her foot.

Hannah, to whom Polly's impudence was only less distasteful than her father's hypocrisy, and who, in her present mood, was more than ordinarily incensed at the girl, now manifested her rising wrath in the exclamation, "I should like to know what's sot you on the high ropes so to-day? Is it because they have killed your uncle Baultie, and you s'pose your folks is comin' in for a share of his money; or is it because you've got the coroner an' his men down ter your house, an' you think that's lively an' entertainin'?"

"There ain't much fun in hearing about nothin' but murders, and inquests, and funerals," said Polly, "if they do bring a run o' custom, as father says. I'm sure I should die o' the dumps if I hadn't something pleasanter to think of."

"A run o' custom! Oh, that's your father's view on't, is it? And yourn's to get rid o' trouble of all sorts, by shuttin' your eyes an' hardenin' your heart. Wal, 'children an' fools speak truth,' an' I believe yer."

"I don't see any use," said Polly, apologetically, "in making yourself miserable about other folks' misfortunes. It's time enough when your own come."

"An' come they will, fast enough, yer may depend on't," retorted Hannah, in a tone of prophetic warning. "You mark my words, Polly Stein. The Lord sends his dispensations, fust in marcy, an' then in wrath; them that takes home the fust an' profits by it, is sometimes spared the last; but if His children are deaf to the storm, He sends the thunderbolt. Such things as has been happenin' in this 'ere neighbourhood the last day or two might sober them that's older in sin than you've had time fur yet" (your whinin' old father for one, this in the audible undertone); "but since you don't choose to go shares in others' sorrers, He'll send yer some on yer own account, I'll promise yer."

Polly received this rebuke in silence. Her aunt was excited, the rude girl herself a little awed by the solemn

vehemence of the threat. It was during the pause that succeeded, when Hannah was leaning back in her chair with a red spot flushing each cheek, and Polly was staring stupidly on the floor, that Angie came in from the pantry. She wore her hood and shawl, and brought the teakettle in her hand.

“Where are you goin’?” asked Hannah, glad to avoid further words with Polly, by addressing somebody else.

“Home for a little while. Will you please, ma’am, tell Mrs. Rawle” (Margery was upstairs, whither, seeing Polly approach, she had betaken herself) “that I’ll come back to-night and sleep? I’ve filled the teakettle,” she added, as she stooped and hung it over the fire.

“You’ve no need to come back,” said Hannah, sharply; then, softening a little from the hard tone to which her voice had been pitched ever since Polly’s entrance, she added, “you may, though, if you’ve a mind ter. You don’t come for nothin’; you hain’t got a lazy bone in yer body — I see that plain enough.” And as Angie completed her arrangements at the fireplace, and quickly and capably swept up the hearth, the eyes of the observing old woman rested on her complacently.

“I’ll go at the same time,” said Polly, starting eagerly, as Angie moved towards the door.

“You’d better stay awhile in my place,” suggested Angie, with an endeavour to evade her company.

“Take her ’long with you, for goodness’ sake!” interposed Hannah, who detected the hesitation on Angie’s part.

The matter was no longer optional with Angie, however; Polly had already darted through the doorway, and was the first outside.

“Gracious! how glad I am to get away!” was her exclamation, before Angie had closed the door behind them. “I don’t see how you can bear to stay there, Angie; I wouldn’t be hired to. Law! aunt Hannah snapped me up so, every word I said, you’ve no idea — ugh! don’t I hate her!”

“She’s had a dreadful stroke; it makes her keen and cross, I suppose,” remarked Angie.

"Pooh! she's always cross, fur's I see," said Polly.

"Good-by; I'm going across the fields," said Angie, with a second effort to escape Polly's society.

"So am I," and Polly turned off also in that direction.

"It's further for you."

"Oh, never mind; I'll go this way too, for sake o' company."

"The path is better worn by the road," suggested Angie; but it was of no avail. Polly didn't mind the deep snow — liked it — was determined to go the same way as Angie went.

Angie moved on in advance, and walked as fast as she could.

"Don't be in such a hurry — I want to talk with you," cried Polly; "wait!" And Polly came alongside and linked her arms in Angie's, disregarding the fact that the footpath across the fields was hardly wide enough for one.

Angie trembled; she was so afraid Polly meant to question her about Geordie. But her fears were groundless. The time had been when, on an occasion like the present, Polly would have made her handsome cousin the constant topic, not that she had ever really thought of rivalling Angie in this quarter, but she liked to take advantage of an instance of pique between the lovers, to boast of her familiarity with George, insinuate her suspicions of his feelings and his preferences, and hint at the terms of cousinly confidence which had grown out of their close relationship. It had sometimes happened, in this way, that she had succeeded in exciting Angie's curiosity, and by feigning a knowledge which she did not possess, had extracted from Angie confessions which the latter afterwards regretted; for Polly, as a self-appointed meddler and go-between, always contrived to make mischief, and generally to widen the breach. It had long since become instinctive with Angie, to avoid her interrogations and interference in all matters where Geordie was concerned. How much more, then, when life and death were in the balance, and a word might betray, did she shrink from committing the scales of fate to such dangerous hands!

But now she had agitated herself needlessly on this point. Polly's mind — a mind of no great capacity at the best — was filled to overflowing with another subject; so that, happily, there was no space left for her cousin George. She could talk of nothing but the captain; and though the captain was not a topic on which Angie could dwell without pain, it was a blessed relief from what she had anticipated. So she listened with patience and a tolerable show of interest, while Polly dwelt on the trivial details connected with this distinguished guest at the tavern: telling at what time he usually took his meals; at what hour he breakfasted on the morning of his departure; what choice viands were served up for him on that occasion by Polly's own direction; and what compliments he paid to Polly while she was presiding at the coffee-pot, and entertaining him with the particulars of her uncle's murder just brought to light. Then she related how he invited her to drive to church in the hired sleigh that was to take him to the city; how he helped her out at the church door; how the country folks, engrossed as they were with the news from the mountain, found time to whisper and stare; and how beautifully he waved his hand to her as she stood on the church steps. And he set off for the city, her father's stable-boy driving, and the horse prancing, as if he realized that the captain was worth making some effort to please.

Polly told all this with such relish — a relish infinitely increased by the sting of jealousy she believed herself to be awakening in her hearer, that Angie was spared the necessity of encouraging her by a word. Even when there was a pause, Polly was so engaged with self-important airs and meditations on her own triumph, that she was content to let Angie proceed in mortified silence; and so they reached Mr. Cousin's house long before this fruitful topic was exhausted.

Angie stood with her hand on the door-latch, waiting to bid Polly good-by; but Polly did not stir, and kept on talking. At last Angie verged upon rudeness in her efforts to get excused and go into the house, interrupting Polly with —

"You can tell me the rest another time; it's so cold standing here — good-by;" and she made a motion to go in.

"It is cold," said Polly. "I'm almost frozen; I'll come in a little while and get warm;" and thus, self-invited, Polly pushed in also.

The moment they entered the sitting-room, Angie's eye fell on a letter which laid upon the table, directed, as she saw at a glance, to herself. Everything frightened Angie now, and instinctively her hand closed over the letter, but not before Polly also had spied it, and recognized the handwriting.

"Why, that's Cap'n Josselyn's writing! That can't be mean't for you!" cried Polly; and grasping Angie's hand, she snatched the letter from under it, and held it up to the light.

Angie's eyes flashed fire with anger and repressed alarm. She made a motion to recover the letter; but Polly, having convinced herself that it was really Angie's property, flung it over her head, and turned to ask Happy, who was just looking in from the kitchen, by what messenger it had come.

"Your pa's stable-boy fetched it, miss; he says the gen'l'man he driv to York gi' it to him for Miss Angie."

"Where is the boy?" asked Polly, impatiently.

"Wal, miss, ole Hap see him walk up to the barn, for to look arter our Sim; thar he is now, jes' comin' back, I declar'! Lucky Massa Stein don know how he's ben a spendin' his time this 'ere arternoon!"

Without waiting further than to catch sight of the captain's messenger, Polly rushed out to intercept him, and inquire what other letters or commissions the captain had entrusted to him. But she could not learn that there were any other letters or tokens from the recreant captain. The utmost that her pertinacious cross-questioning could extract from the clumsy Mercury, was to the effect that "the letter to Miss Angie Cousin, an' a shillin' to pay fur carryin' it, was the only arrant, 'cept a dab o' paper to Mr. Stein, tellin' where to send the cap'n's trunk, 'cause he wasn't comin' back no more."

Meanwhile Angie, left to herself, meekly took her letter from the floor, broke the seal, stamped with what looked like a family crest, and read as follows: —

New York, Dec. 26, 1812.

“CHARMING MISS ANGIE, — Adieu! My sole pang in leaving New Jersey is the thought that I shall never again see the fair friend,

“Whose heart was my home in an enemy's land.”

I flatter myself that the emotion is mutual. Continue, I entreat you, to cherish tender recollections of your devoted Josselyn. Our paths, like our lots in life, lie apart. Had Heaven placed you, dear girl, in the sphere you are well fitted to adorn, who knows what we might have been to each other? It grieves me that one whose beauty and grace have cheered my exile should be doomed to waste her sweetness upon a neighbourhood so contracted and vulgar as that of Stein's Plains; but habit, I have no doubt, reconciles you to many things which shock the sensibilities of a stranger; and, alas! every station in life has its disadvantages! It may be a consolation to you to be assured that you will not be quite forgotten in those more aristocratic circles to which my destiny leads me. I shall still carry your image in my heart. Many a fair daughter of my own country will suffer by a comparison with it; and when the toast goes round, I shall pique the curiosity of my brother officers, by giving them ‘The New Jersey belle!’

“And now, my sweet Western flower, farewell! Sad word, which I would whisper in your ear, instead of entrusting it to paper; but time presses. I have received my release from your Government at Washington, and finding an immediate opportunity to set sail for England, have not the leisure to indulge myself in a visit to Stein's Plains — I would say, rather to *you*; the only object there worth remembering — the only being whom I care to honour with a parting

notice. Adieu then, my charmer! and let me hope you will sometimes remember, with a sigh of regret,

“Your enthusiastic admirer,

“PAUL AUGUSTUS JOSSELYN.”

Shame, indignation, disgust, — all the emotions which a proud girl can feel, who has been humbled, slighted, and scorned by a worthless and conceited lover, rose up together, and scourged poor Angie, until her blood tingled in every vein. “For this — for *this*,” thought she, as she dashed the letter on the table, “I have bargained everything — all that life had promised, or sin and death could destroy. O God! my punishment is greater than I can bear!” and she pressed her hand against her heart, which, in her intensity of contrition and agony, seemed as if it would burst. She had thrown herself into a chair in the farthest corner of the room; her eyelids were convulsively strained together, as if she were striving to imprison her very soul in darkness. But, alas! there is no hiding from oneself! She could not shut out the remorseful and degrading images that were torturing her. Witnesses of a love that had been true to her from her childhood were thronging around her with sad, reproachful looks; the ghostly countenance of the murdered man transfixed her with its stare; the poor fugitive from justice, his features stained with sin and distorted with despair, looked back at her accusingly; ministers of vengeance shook their threatening fingers in the air, and the fiendish faces of demons mocked her with their laughter.

The last all wore the features of the captain — the varying expressions that had so captivated her a few days since, only serving now to give variety to insult.

The terrible events of the last two days had so pressed upon one another, that until now Angie had almost forgotten the part the captain had played in the drama; at least, had forgotten to reproach him. But now he had forced himself upon her remembrance, and with bitter upbraidings she exclaimed to herself, “He has made a fool of me — the cold-

hearted wretch! And I, oh, I have been the cause of all this misery!"

Angie did not spare herself. If she cried out in her agony against him who had encouraged her heartlessness, it was not that she might shake off the burden of blame. From the first she had bowed herself to that burden. Thorough in her penitence, generous in her self-reproach, she would gladly have suffered all the ignominy, borne all the penalty. Humiliated to the dust, the one cry of her spirit was, "On me, on me, let the retribution fall!"

It is the cry of many a burdened soul; but it may never be. "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." There was retribution enough in store for Angie; the poor girl scarcely need claim more than her share; but the hardest feature in her punishment was not the blasting of her own hopes; it was seeing the wide-spread desolation caused by the whirlwind, to which she in the beginning had lent breath. To stand and view the mischief done, is sometimes the severest penalty. If Angie could have been at once struck out of the game of life, she would have submitted gladly. As it was, hers was to be a harder fate; she was to live and look on.

Nor was she even to be suffered to meditate undisturbed. Not for self, henceforth, was her life to be. In action and in sympathy she must for the future find her mission and her solace.

She was roused from her wretched self-indulgence by a sudden loud cry, accompanied by a deep heaving from some human breast near her, and succeeded by an outburst of vehement weeping. She looked up suddenly, and there, opposite to her, sat Polly — the captain's letter open at her feet, and her whole frame convulsed with sobs. She had come back, unheard by Angie, and taking advantage of the latter's abstraction, had read the letter from beginning to end, — a fact of which she seemed to feel no shame, and attempted no concealment.

Angie, not comprehending the scene at a first glance,

and moved only by astonishment, started up, and ran to her, thinking from the noise she made that she was hurt and in bodily pain; but Polly pushed her back with evident spite, and kept on crying — not sentimentally, nor hysterically, but with a loud, blubbering cry, like that of a whipped school-boy. Angie looked down, saw the letter, and felt a momentary contempt for her visitor, which was not softened, when Polly, observing Angie's glance, sprang to her feet, and vented a portion of her rage by stamping on the letter, and then spurning it, or, more correctly, kicking it across the floor with her foot.

Angie picked it up for the second time, folded it, and put it in her pocket. Polly kept on sobbing and roaring, making a most vulgar and passionate exhibition of grief. There may be dignity and self-respect even amid tears; but these were qualities in which Polly was wanting at all times, and the utter self-abandonment of her behaviour could only be compared to that of an uproarious child. She bent her thin body backwards and forwards, caught her breath convulsively, and even gave vent at intervals to short, sharp shrieks.

These unusual sounds soon brought Happy Boose to learn the cause of the commotion.

"Lud a massy!" was her comment. "Yer ain't kilt, are ye? Ole Hap thought mebbe Miss Angie was a beatin' yer; same as ole missus down South used to beat dis yer nigger-wench — but eberybody's so 'cited and crazed-like dis yer time, dat dey cries for little or nothin'." And Happy, apparently concluding that Polly's case was of this kind, retreated into her kitchen and shut the door.

Polly now dropped her arms upon the table and her head upon her arms, and began to gasp and choke so, that Angie was first frightened, and at length moved to pity; for this grief, though coarse and childish in its expression, was, nevertheless, unmistakably real.

"Don't cry so, Polly," she said at length, laying her hand kindly on Polly's shoulder.

Polly shook the hand off; but on the action's being re-

peated, she submitted to it more patiently, and even made an effort to repress her sobs.

"He's a good-for-nothing, flirting fellow — not worth minding!" suggested Angie, by way of consolation.

"Oh, you think so, do you?" gasped Polly. "That's just because he's jilted you. I always knew he didn't care two straws for you — he used to laugh at you behind your back; but —" here Polly was seized with another crying fit, which lasted some time, but at length she managed to ejaculate, in a sort of shriek, which escaped her amid a succession of spasms and sobs; "but he ought to be ashamed to behave so cruel to *me*!"

In spite of Polly's malice, which made itself evident in the earlier part of this remark, Angie, who was in no mood to care for her spite, much less retort, assented to the latter proposition, selfish as it was, saying, in a sympathetic tone, "Yes, it is a shame!"

"What's a shame?" cried Polly, firing up at this. "What do you know about the captain and me? Like enough he'll write or send for me yet. I reckon I know the cap'n better 'n you do."

"Then I wouldn't be so discouraged."

"Discouraged? Who's discouraged? You, like enough; I ain't." But Polly here contradicted herself, by bursting into another passionate fit of crying, which Angie judged it best to wait the conclusion of in silence.

Apparently Polly considered her boasted courage a good thing to rest her cause upon, for after a great effort she succeeded in mastering her tears, gradually settling into the sulks, — a mood in which she was scornfully indifferent to Angie's offer of water to bathe her face, by this time extremely red and tear-stained.

"No! let me alone! I don't want nothing from *you*," was her rude acknowledgment of the attention; and jerking her shoulders from side to side, to express her aversion to her hostess, she wiped her face with a soiled pocket-hand-

kerchief, readjusted her bonnet and shawl, and flounced out of the house.

Angie watched her go down the road, and unconsciously groaned aloud. Absurd as Polly's pretensions might be, and degrading as was her manifestation of disappointment, Angie thus murmured to herself — "Poor thing; there she goes — carrying home her burden of sorrow;" and Angie, the fountain of whose sympathies was stirred to its depths, groaned, not merely for Polly, not merely for herself, but for a whole world lying in wickedness, and for a sorrow as world-wide as the sin.

When Polly was fairly out of sight, she turned and went slowly up to her own room. She now drew the captain's letter from her pocket, and looking absently about her for a place in which to deposit it, opened a bureau-drawer. She started back as if a serpent lay coiled there; then stood a moment gazing on the muslin, flowers, and ribbon, which had constituted her becoming finery on the night of the Christmas ball, — that fatal night, of which she was never to think again without a shudder. She tossed the letter on the top of them.

"Lie there," she might have said; "an epitaph on my buried youth, a sermon on vanity." But Angie could not moralize, she could only feel. That she did feel this and more, there could be no doubt, for she closed the drawer solemnly as if it had been a tomb; and it was years before she ventured again to open it.

She wandered about the house awhile in the restlessness of despair, avoiding Happy Boose for fear of her inquisitive tongue, and not venturing downstairs until she heard her father come in. Then she went below, and entertained him as well as she could, making his tea as usual, and trying to appear collected and cheerful. She even played a game at draughts with the old Frenchman, and did not leave for the night until it was near his bed-time.

"Ain't you 'fraid to go 'lone cross dem fields dese times?" asked Happy, as she followed her to the door. "Pity, now,

Massa George wan't here! I thought Miss Angie when I see you giv' him a walkin'-ticket, that we'd be wishin' him back bad nuff, 'fore long."

"No; O no; nobody 'll hurt me," replied Angie, peering into the darkness with terror, however, as she spoke. "Take good care of my father, Happy."

"Law, Miss Angie," said Happy, "I ain't much 'fraid o' them villains, — leastways, wouldn't be ef massa wan't so discouragin' jes at bed-time; but what with puttin' the carvin'-knife where't 'll be handy, an' fastenin' up the winders with the kitchinforks, it seems as if he 'spected 'em, sure. I says my prayers ebery night, and I b'lieve the Lord 'll take care o' massa an' ole Hap; but once in awhile, you know, Miss Angie, there's ugly critturs roun' that will rob and murder spite o' anybody."

With which final intimation of a doubt the faithful Happy watched Angie's plunge into the gloom, and continued listening in the doorway until she had time to reach her destination, after which the old negress assisted Mr. Cousin in prudently fastening up the doors and windows, — a precaution universally observed at Stein's Plains ever since the event which had served to alarm the whole neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Fresh Catastrophe.

It has been said that the murder of Baultie Rawle, with the circumstances attending it, constituted the nine days' wonder of the people of Stein's Plains. What, nine days only? Surely a subject of such engrossing interest could not have been laid to rest in so brief a space of time? By no means; at the expiration of that period the excitement was still at its height. But now a diversion was suddenly created in the public mind, for, on the tenth day, tidings of a fresh catastrophe reached the Plains. A catastrophe which, if possible, possessed for the inhabitants a nearer and more vital interest, involving as it did the fate of one who, unlike

the murdered man, was a universal favourite, — and furnishing a terrible response to the query, so many times passed from lip to lip, “What has become of Geordie Rawle?”

“Have you heard the news?” had lately been a common question at Stein’s Plains, where fresh developments, real or imaginary, were hourly reported; but it came with renewed force this day from the mouth of the village blacksmith, who, standing outside the forge among a little knot of his neighbours, thus mysteriously intimated to Farmer Rycker, who had suddenly drawn up his team on the way to mill, the cause and meaning of such an unusual assembly of idlers on a week day.

“No; what is’t? Speak out, man! Has the whole thing come ter light? Have they kitched the rascal?”

“O-o-o-h no!” replied the smith, with that prolongation of tone which gives weight to an assertion, especially a contradictory one, — “that would be good news, this is bad — bad.”

“More bad news!” muttered the farmer, commencing to clamber down from his wagon. “Who’s consarned in’t?” he questioned anxiously, as soon as his feet touched the ground, and he found himself beside the smith; “the Britishers ain’t in York Harbour, I hope?”

“No; it’s a family consarn — a sorer to the whole neighbourhood, but specially to the Rawles, — misfortins never come singly. It’s about Geordie.”

“What ’bout Geordie?” cried the farmer, advancing towards the knot of rustics. “What’s happened to him? Where is he?”

For a moment there was no reply to the question. The smith, who had suffered Rycker to precede him, took advantage of the shelter from observation afforded by the farmer’s bulky figure, to pass a sooty hand across his moistened eyes, the result of which was a countenance more grimy and lugubrious than before.

The farmer looked from face to face, and impatiently repeated his question. “What’s happened to Geordie?”

It was easy to see that the little assemblage were filled with emotions very different from those which had lately occupied them. There was no anger, no fear, and but little speculation on their faces — only horror and sadness. Nobody seemed willing to give utterance to what was trembling on every lip; at last an old man, leaning on a stick, solemnly pronounced the words, "He's dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yes, drowned."

"Good Lord! How did it happen? When? Where?"

There was silence again at this, broken only by a hysterical sob from the smith's daughter, who turned and ran into the house, and a groan from her mother, who likewise sought refuge from observation, by suddenly throwing her apron over her head.

The old man tried to speak again, but his voice choked him. The children standing by looked up in their parents' faces sympathetically.

"Nobody likes to say much about it," whispered the smith, plucking the farmer by the sleeve, and drawing him back a little towards the wagon. "It may ha' been an accident; but we are all suspicious as how he made way with himself, — poor feller."

Rycker's face now assumed the prevailing look of horror, instantly succeeded by an expression of eager curiosity. "Took his own life! Committed suicide! What, Geordie? Why, I'd as soon ha' believed it of our Joe!" was the series of exclamations with which he received the tidings. "Who brought the news? Have they found his body? Is 't generally credited?" was the cross-examination with which he proceeded to sound his informant.

"Ay! that's jest it," responded the smith. "The body's turned up, an' there's the whole story on the face on't, yer see;" and here the smith, who had by this time mastered the emotion he had felt in naming the subject to a new comer, laid down his finger with emphasis, and spoke with the

oracular air of a man who had been among the first to be initiated in a weighty matter. "One o' them officers, what's been back an' forth so much on Baultie's business, fetched up a city paper last night, and stood readin' it at Stein's bar, smokin' a pipe atween whiles. There was a lot of us neighbours loafin' round, talkin' about the affair on the mountain yonder. 'Hullo! what's this 'ere?' says the feller, — an' he takes the pipe out of his mouth and reads to himself a minute. 'This consarns your folks up here;' says he, — 'same name, anyhow!' Of course we was all wide awake at that, an' then he out with it. I can't remember the wordin' on't, but I've got it here in my hat some wher; they wouldn't let the paper out o' the bar-room, so, as I'm not much of a hand at writin', I sent my darter up to copy it out. Here it be," and he produced from the greasy lining of his hat, where he had been diligently fumbling, the following advertisement, which in a blundering way he contrived to read for his neighbours' edification.

"The body of a man was yesterday discovered on Staten Island, where it had undoubtedly been washed ashore. It was above the ordinary height, — hair light, apparently the body of a young man. He wore a stout overcoat, with smooth metallic buttons; in the pocket of which was found a silver watch, of English manufacture, marked on the inside, "George Rawle." The body had, probably, been under water a week or more. It has been deposited at the Catherine Street Ferry-house. Friends will please call at once and identify the same."

"Good Lud! what are we comin' ter?" cried the farmer, as the smith finished reading. "Murder an' suicide both in one week! Who'd a thought it?"

"I can tell yer we was pooty well stuck up at the tavern," remarked the smith, as he folded the paper, and replaced it in his hat.

"Has anybody gone down to York to see 'bout it?" asked the farmer. "Have they told his mother?"

"Stein was hesitatin' last night, whether to go himself or

send Peter. But Dick Van Hausen's gone down; he ain't one o' yer hesitatin' sort, Dick ain't. Besides, he thought the warld o' Geordie. He started off 'fore daylight."

"An' the old 'ooman? Who's goin' to break it to Margery?"

"Nobody round here would undertake it; so they sent for the dominie. He's jest gone down there; I see his shay turn round the corner by the tavern a minute or two 'fore you driv' up."

"Poor creetur!" said the farmer, compassionately; "poor creetur!"

The smith assented to this, by shaking his head from side to side in silent sympathy.

"But who knows but it was an accident?" queried Farmer Rycker, in the hopeful tone of a man unwilling to believe anything without sufficient proof; "or foul play, mebbe! We've known enough o' that sort o' thing lately to cridit any amount o' bloody work. Geordie was a good-natured feller; but somebody might ha' owed him a grudge, or he might ha' got washed overboard, or stepped off some wharf, or —"

"Oh! 't wan't no sich a thing," interposed the smith, impatiently. "Might ha' been, to be sure, but it wan't. Everything goes to show that he took his own life — meant ter."

"Sich as what!" insisted the cautious and sceptical farmer.

"Wal, his behaviour in general is convincin' enough for me; but there's written evidence inter the bargain. If Peter Stein wan't a thick-headed fool, we'd ha' been sarchin' for the body more'n a week ago."

"Why; did he give Peter warnin' of his intention? Do tell, now!" and the farmer's eyes and mouth grew wide with curiosity.

"'Mounts ter that. It seems Peter had an order in his pocket ever sence Geordie was missin', sayin' as how the mare was lawfully his'n; an' yer must know, it turns out Pete had a mortgage on Nancy; an' one o' them fellers that was up to the Races, an' pooty thick with Geordie, he give Pete a bit o'

writin' a week ago Saturday night, that would ha' put any other friend o' the lad on the scent o' mischief; but Pete, like the drunken fool that he is, never took in any idee, I s'pose, except that he'd got his grip on the horseflesh, that he's allers had a hankerin' arter, to my knowledge."

"An' now, what more's come on't? eh!" cried the farmer. "Who's seen the letter? What does it say?"

"'Twas read out in the bar-room last night; all on us heerd it that was there when the news fust come. Pete called his father one side, an' showed it to him. Old Stein would ha' kept pooty quiet about it, seein' 'twan't very flatterin' to father nor son neither; but Dick Van Hausen had got there by that time. He smelt somethin' in the wind — he see old Diedrich an' Pete consultin' together over a scrap o' paper in Geordie's handwritin', an' he would have it out. By jiminy! you should ha' heerd him threaten how he'd have the law down on 'em, if they kept anything back. So they handed it over," — a pause and hesitancy — "an' Dick," — now a great gulp in the smith's throat — "he — he read —"

"Wal?" encouragingly, from the farmer.

"It — it — Oh! I'll tell you, farmer" (at last managing to swallow the bunch in his throat, and so getting voice); "it was kind o' touchin', seein' 'twas poor Geordie that was speakin', an' we all a-thinkin' on him, an' knowin' he was dead."

"Umph!" muttered the farmer; "I s'pose so. An' what was the sum on't?"

"Wal, it was about the money fust, an' the tarms atween him an' Pete — pooty hard tarms he said they was — 'specially as they was most likely to be the last. Then he went on to say as how he was cornered an' done fur; that his uncle 'd got the farm pooty nigh, an' Pete had got Nancy; an' now he hoped they was satisfied, seein' there wasn't nothin' more to be had out on him. He did kind o' trust they'd be good to his mother, when she was left alone and poor, an' that Pete 'ud never take a whip to Nancy, 'cause she wasn't used to it. As fur him, 'twan't no matter what become of him;

they needn't know nor care. 'Twas enough that he wouldn't never be in anybody's way anymore. An' then he bid Pete good-by, an' said 'twas for longer than he thought fur, perhaps, but that 'twas no use lookin' fur him, for he wan't wuth the sarch, and wouldn't be found no way."

The kind-hearted and excitable smith did not enunciate the above phrases of piteous import without pausing several times to brush away a tear, and now and then whimpering outright. As he finished he lifted his hat, drew from its crown an old silk handkerchief, and having wiped his face and forehead energetically, replaced it, with the resolute air of one who, repenting of a weakness, meant thus to wipe away every trace of effeminacy, and be ready to act the man again.

The farmer, whose easy, phlegmatic temperament saved him from extreme action or sensibility in any case, merely looked very grave, and ejaculated "Sad piece o' business! — altogether a sad piece o' business!"

"I've *thought* all along," said the smith, at length, after a decorous and feeling pause had somewhat expressed the solemnity both men experienced in view of the catastrophe, "that there was no accountin' for Geordie's bein' out o' the way so at such a time as this."

The smith was mistaken — he never *had* thought any such thing. He, like all his neighbours, had been satisfied with the report, innocently circulated by Van Hausen, that George had started the very day after the races, to once more seek employment at road-making in Virginia; and such was the distance, that, in those days when railroads and telegraphs were unknown, nobody expected that the news of his uncle's death would overtake or reach him immediately.

Now, however, that this terrible development had thrown light upon the past, and excited the smith's imagination to the utmost, he conscientiously believed that he had along been haunted by a presentiment that there was more trouble and mischief brewing for the Rawles; that he had from the first considered Geordie's absence mysterious and alarming, and

that nothing but the confidence other people seemed to feel had kept him silent. Nor were these presentiments, after the fact, peculiar to the smith. His imagination in this respect was perhaps less deceptive, and the intuitions he claimed to have had, less prophetic than those of most of the men (to say nothing of the women) of the parish. Foreshadowings of the event, now that it was proclaimed, soon proved to have been universal, if one could believe the gossiping egotism with which each claimed to have been foremost in anticipating this desperate act of self-destruction; and as to its motive, there was such clearness of conviction in the popular mind, that to doubt would have been a heresy certain to be visited with contempt, if too obdurate to be overcome by argument.

Thus there was scarce an instance of nonconformity to the general opinion, and the sentiments expressed by Farmer Rycker and the blacksmith, as they continued their dialogue, were a fair sample of those which went the rounds of the neighbourhood.

"*'Twas* kind o' strange," said Farmer Rycker, musingly, in reply to the smith's suggestion, that Geordie's absence had been mysterious from the beginning; then the idea which had struck the farmer as a novel one, growing familiar while he reflected on it, he added, confidently, "I thought so from the fust."

"Why," said the blacksmith, "the mornin' I came down from the mountain, 'fore I'd half finished tellin' my wife 'bout the murder, an' the rope, an' the tracks, an' the crowd there was there, an' all, — 'Where's Geordie?' says she, 'warn't he there?' 'No he warn't,' says I; an' then I scratched my head an' thought a minit — 'Queer,' says I, 'but he warn't.'"

"An' he warn't to the ball at Stein's," remarked the farmer. "I missed him there."

"No," replied the smith, "he was so took down about Nancy that night he warn't up to dancin', nor any other kind o' frolickin'. I shod the mare myself, an' I was as sure as a

dollar she'd win. 'Twas a plaguy shame, and an awful disappointment to the lad.'

"So I heerd tell," said the farmer, "but 'twas a kind o' thing he'd no business to calkerlate on, any way."

"True 'nuf, an' he wouldn't have," said the smith, apologetically, "only he'd been gettin' pooty desprate afore that. I'd seen it workin' in his face. I thought what 'twould come ter."

"Do tell!" exclaimed the farmer, "there hain't never been sich a thing in the Rawle family afore, has there?"

"Not as I know on," was the curt reply; "but there must allers be a fust."

"It's a dreadful end fur a man to come ter."

"Oh, dreadful! the wust kind."

"It's an awful *sin*," said the farmer. "How will he ever dare stand before God at the judgment-bar?" he added, in a tone which excluded all hope of heavenly mercy; for, like most men of his day, a day when the causes and nature of suicide, with the aberration of mind which almost invariably precedes the act, were but little understood, the farmer looked upon the crime as one for which there was no atonement, and which even the gentle virtue of charity must steel herself against immovably.

"Poor feller! poor Geordie! I'm sorry for him, anyhow," said the smith, giving way to an irresistible impulse of humanity.

"It don't do to give in to yer feelin's in these 'ere things," asserted the farmer. "It's a terrible, sinful act in a young man that's had pious parents an' a good bringin' up."

"Mebbe so," replied the smith, "but I can't help thinkin' what a horrid state o' mind the poor lad must ha' been in 'fore he got worked up to't. He's had lots o' crosses an' disappointments, Geordie has — lots, an' now this is the windin' up. The lad may ha' been to blame, but I can't help pityin' him. I hain't a grain o' pity, though, for them that's got this thing to lay at their door — not a grain," — and the smith became excited as he spoke. "I'd as soon take Geordie's chance at

the judgment-bar, any day, as that o' them that hurried him there."

"Wal, I couldn't say as I'd ventur' on any sich risk as that," argued the prudent farmer. "There's a door o' salvation allers left open to them the Lord spares; them that flies in His face shuts it behind 'em, to my thinkin'."

"That's good reasonin'," replied the smith; "but when a feller's driv' past reasonin', he ain't more'n half responsible — that's my way o' argufyin', and I'd as soon stand before God's bar this day in Geordie's place, as behind the tavern bar in Stein's; that's jest my notion o' things now."

"Stein's been hard on the boy, I dare say?" The farmer put this remark interrogatively. The farmer was a gossip, and though cautious himself, was anxious to draw his companion out.

"Hard! he's hard on everybody's boy. I can't keep my 'prentices away from that groggery of his'n — no, nor my own boy nuther, as to that," muttered the smith. "I tell yer," he continued vehemently, "that Stein's a fox, an' that tavern bar's a nuisance. What else brings all the rogues out of York, to beat out old men's brains and turn young men's topsy-turvy?"

"It's a bad consarn," responded Rycker, "but there's temptations everywhere; young folks must keep out o' the way on 'em, that's all; must go round the stump, as I tell my Joe. But speakin' o' Baultie, they say he was mighty tight-fisted with Geordie. I don't mean to say no ill o' the dead, but I've heern tell as how he an' Stein together were pooty aggravatin' in that Virginny-road-buildin' business. I don't mean to say 'twas so, I merely heern tell on't."

"There ain't no question 'twas jest so," replied the smith; "they all pulled one way, and that was agin poor Geordie. Why, you see how 'twas; even Peter, Peter Stein, thick-skulled ninny as he is, could come it over Geordie in money matters."

"Take it altogether, 'twas pooty discouragin'," commented the farmer, in a sympathetic voice; then, as if

fearing that he might fall into the weakness of apologizing for crime, he added, in an implacable tone, "'Tain't no excuse though for sich a cryin' sin an' shame as Geordie's been guilty on now — 'tain't no excuse, I say."

"Law, farmer," said the smith, emphatically, "'twan't any o' them things did the business. What's the use o' mincin' matters, goin' round and round the stump, as you say?" Then, with the air of an attorney who has reached the vital point in his argument, he continued, "Them things was irritatin', an' got him worked up to a red heat; but the t'other was the *blow*" — and he brought his hand down on the back of the farmer's horse with the same swing, if not the same force, with which he would have struck his anvil. The horse started; the smith was thrown off his balance.

"Who? what!" cried the farmer to the smith. "Whoa! whoa!" to his horse.

"Why, that confounded gal o' Cousinses," answered the smith, recovering himself; "if any livin' bein's out-an'-out responsible for the end the lad's come to, it's her!"

The smith spoke in a tone of assurance, from which there was no appeal. The farmer, without questioning the fact, responded, "Wal, I've heerd our folks say Geordie was soft in that 'ere quarter — has been allers. What 's been to pay there? I want to know. Did she give him the slip, or what?"

"Hang her! I only wish she'd done that long ago, an' made a free man on him; but 'stead o' that, she's blown hot an' blown cold for this dozen years, drivin' the poor fellow from fevers to agur-fits, only to give him a death-blow at last. If that gal's conscience don't gnaw on her when she gits this day's news — wal, it's because her heart's as hard as my anvil yonder."

"She's got another sweetheart, they say," said Rycker; "been keepin' company with that young cap'n up at the tavern."

"Course she has," replied the smith; "didn't you see 'em sparkin' the night o' the ball. 'What 'ud Geordie say to

that?' says I to my old 'ooman. 'The consated thing!' says she, 'there won't no good come o' it; now, you mark my words, husband, there won't no good come of Angie Cousin's cuttin' such shines with that 'ere stranger chap.'"

"Geordie wan't there to hold his own," remarked the farmer. "Geordie kept out o' the way, an' gave her a clean swing that night."

"'Cause why? 'Cause he was cut out, and he know'd it. Time has been when Geordie wouldn't a gi'n in to nobody; but what's the use o' fightin' agin luck? and all Geordie's good luck's desarted him o' late. I was glad he wan't gawkin' round at the ball, for my part. A pooty figure he'd a made playin' second-fiddle to that 'ere furrin monkey. I wish he'd had the spunk to give him a drubbin' next day, and tell Angie Cousin to go the devil with her airs. Most any on us would ha' backed him up in that 'ere. Howsomever, if he must needs complain to her like a baby, an' then go drown himself like a dog: wal, I — I — I wish he'd been more of a man, I do; but I can't help pityin' him, nuther."

"That's it — he's died like a dog," said the farmer, catching at that portion of the smith's commentary which coincided most closely with his notions of the nature of George's crime and its consequences. "An' what's more, he'll be buried like a dog; and the door o' marcy's shut on his soul same as it would be on what's left of a dead beast. An' so ends that branch o' the Rawle stock! I see long ago that it was comin' to ruin. Van Hausen had hopes o' the lad, an' a good word to speak for him; can't say as I had. See now who was nearest right. It's a disgraceful thing to ha' happened in an honest neighbourhood, an' a warnin' to all young men that's a runnin' down hill. I shall hold it over our Joe's head if ever I see him a gettin' unstiddy. But as you say, neighbour," in a qualifying tone, "the young 'ooman's to blame. What did she want to be smirkin' with the aristocrisy fur, an' jiltin' a clever Jarsey feller that she's known all her life. Farmers' sons is good enough for my gals; what's Cousines' darter got to boast of, that she should be allers apin' city gentry. I

reckon that 'ere brass buttoned chap of a Britisher's only been makin' a fool on her. He'll desart her in a twinklin', like enough, an' sarve her right."

"Has so!" exclaimed the smith; "was off like a rocket, an' never stayed to bid her good-by, as I've heern tell. Angie Cousins allers held her head pooty high. Somehow she had Frenchy kind o' ways like the old man, an' couldn't help bein' genteel. Nobody 'd ha' liked her the wuss for it, if she'd only behaved herself; indeed, she's been a pop'ler kind of a gal. But she'll be pinte at now all her days, an' she richly deserves it."

"Geordie's relations 'll all be down on her," suggested Rycker; "it 'll help to clear him, yer see; so it 'll be nateral."

"It'll be nateral enough they should owe her a grudge. Van Hausen was a cussin' her last night at the tavern; the last words I heerd him kind o' mutterin' in his throat, was 'Cuss that gal.'"

"He knew consid'able about it, then? How should he, I wonder? — He ain't no family, an' he ain't round much to see what's goin' on 'mong the young folks."

"Wal, it seems Angie owned up to him, the mornin', arter Baultie's affair, that she an' Geordie'd quarrelled the day before, an' she hadn't seen him since, an' didn't expect ter. 'Twas that made him so sure the lad had started off for Virginny in a huff. Oh, Van Hausen never minces matters; when he heerd o' this thing, he laid it all to her door, — same's I do — same as everybody will, allers."

"She's got a great load to bear, then," remarked Rycker.

Apparently Rycker's horse, which, since he had become quieted after the smith's blow, had stood with tolerable patience waiting for the conclusion of this dialogue, had come to the conclusion that he had a great load to bear too. The smith, always a lounge when not at work at his forge, was hanging his whole weight on the horse's neck. The weight of the wagon was pressing on him too from behind. He now

made a restless motion, discharged the smith, and reminded his master of business.

"Time I was off," said the latter. "Whoa! whoa, there! won't you?" And having slowly mounted his wagon, and checked the restlessness of the horse, he looked back at the smith with an eye longing for more of the late exciting gossip. "Sad story I've got to carry back with me to the farm — enough fur one day!" Then, with a quick afterthought, "P'raps if I come back this way, you'll ha' learned how they take it up to the cottage; how Margery bears it; what Baultie's widder has to say to the dominie; an' whether Angie Cousin's consid'able took down. Sorry I've got to go to mill this mornin' — out-o'-the-way place; however, the boss'll be glad to hear the news. Whoa!" — to the horse which had gone on several paces. "Look here!" — leaning back, and speaking in a raised voice to the smith, who was standing deserted in the middle of the road — "you'll be down to the tavern and seein' the neighbours; you'll pick up all there is goin'! I'll come back this way anyhow — d'yer hear?" screaming out the question. "Find out all yer can!" Then in a louder voice yet, as he moved off, "D'yer hear?"

CHAPTER XV.

Breaking the News.

DOMINIE VAN ZANDT was a man whose doctrine was as hard as the nether millstone, and whose heart was as soft as the lily-cup that floats in the sun just above the mill-wheel, and knows nothing about the grinding process that is going on below.

As the dominie drove past the tavern in his "shay," steeling himself as he best could with the thought of sin, judgment, and endless perdition, he might have been mistaken for the awful and willing messenger of doom. As he stood at the cottage-door, and knocked, his pit-a-pat touch sounded as if

he feared arousing the inmates rather than as if he craved admittance.

Angie opened the door. He thanked her by laying his hand kindly on her head. A gentle benediction — *her* head, too! — a spot on which thunderbolts of blame and retribution ought rather to fall! and he knew it. What business had he to crave a blessing there instead?

How it awed her, poor girl! and added to her fright at seeing the dominie.

He passed into the kitchen. The two old women were sitting opposite each other at the two sides of the fireplace. He saluted them with his old-fashioned courtesy, and took a chair, which Angie placed for him, between them.

Then he coughed — coughed badly; it was severe weather for old men, even robust old men, like him. Why shouldn't he cough, and blow his nose, and stammer, and cough again?

Margery sat staring at him like one petrified. Hannah's head was obstinately turned away. Each believed herself the object of his visit. Margery felt as the victim of some secret and gnawing cancer might feel, who sees in every new comer the expected surgeon, and suspects that he has a sharp knife in his pocket.

Hannah had already known something of his practice, for he had made one professional visit to the cottage since Baultie's death, and finding her in a vindictive state of mind, had exercised his gifts in her behalf by warning her of a wrath more mighty than her own, of which he assured her she had plainly been made the subject in the late signal event in her household — a style of reasoning which had only served to harden her the more. This wrath which he spoke of was the same with which she had threatened Polly Stein; but it was quite another thing to have the arm of terror raised against herself, so that she now turned her back upon him, offended and obdurate. Neither of these old women knew how tender the dominie could be when he felt himself off duty.

"My visit to-day is to you, ma'am," were his opening words, addressed to Margery. Hannah edged round in her chair at this; Margery clung to the arms of hers. "My errand is a painful one, ma'am — very. Your son George —" here he faltered. Hannah bent forward eagerly, Margery only stared with glassy eyes — "has met with a sad fate."

At this there was a bound from the farther side of the kitchen, and two young, strong arms were flung round Margery, who involuntarily relaxed her hold upon the arms of her chair, and accepted the living support thus afforded her. Standing with George's mother pressed to her bosom, her form braced up to meet the shock, and a dilated eye that for a moment put fate at defiance, Angie awaited the next word.

"Once have I spoken, twice also hast thou heard it," said the minister; "that power belongeth unto God. Truly the Lord's hand is heavy upon this house. The voice of his warning has but yesterday been heard on the mountain-top," — and he waved his hand solemnly in the direction of Hannah; "and now," fixing his eye sympathetically on Margery, "the sea has given up its dead. Your son's been missing, I hear, for this ten days, ma'am; still I am afraid it will be a great shock when I tell you that they've found —" here the minister faltered.

"Found what?" screamed Hannah, whose ear had caught her nephew's name, and an allusion to some discovery, and whose quick eye saw that the minister hesitated, and that her sister-in-law had no courage to bid him proceed.

"His body!" — spoken impressively, and in a tone meant for deaf as well as hearing ears.

As he uttered the fatal words, — before he uttered them even, when they had merely framed themselves visibly on his lips, — Angie's arms were loosened from their embrace of Margery; all the fibres of her body, so strained an instant before, suddenly slackened, and as if smitten by the thunder-bolt, whose stroke she was deemed to merit, she sank down,

down to the very floor, giving utterance to no sound — simply sliding lower and lower, until her knees touched the hearth at Margery's feet. She cast one look upward at the agonized features of the mother, met an answering look, which none but she could understand, then buried her face in the old woman's lap, and two withered hands were crossed on the bowed head.

And so they met the shock. In a silence, awful, stony, unbroken by a word or cry, they sustained themselves under this new crisis — sustained each other, too; for the young arms that enfolded the old frame, and would have shielded it if they could, and the old hands that dropped protectingly on the young head, were the seals to a league of mutual support and faith as solemn as if confirmed by an oath.

And that was all. They asked no questions; they had no need to ask any — they saw it all; the desperation, the guilt, the flight, the remorse, the madness, the suicide. All but the last act of the drama had been lived over by them already. Hearts that had almost ceased to beat, at the awful dread that he might some time venture to return; souls that had trembled at their own vital union with his soul, wandering, living, and yet lost; eyes that had looked night and day on a vision of prisons, scaffolds, and his strangled corpse; ears that had rung with the world's hiss and his despairing cry, — what was there left that could strike horror into such? Nothing but the fulfilment of their worst fears, — certainly not the cold, watery grave, with its secresy, its silence, and its long repose.

True, there was the added crime of self-destruction. But what of that? Justice had condemned him already. The strictest creed could do no more, they thought. Or rather did they think at all? — could they? These two poor women had not the moral courage to balance against the horrors of discovery the ray of hope life might yet offer to his soul, and so bargain for shame, that repentance might ensue. They had not logic to calculate thus, nor Christian faith and fortitude

enough bravely to meet and bear God's will in any case. In this moment of dread they could only take counsel of their fears, and, with a sense of relief mingling with their agony, forget to re-condemn the criminal, while assenting to the whisper of their timid hearts — "Better death than betrayal!"

So they bore it wonderfully, as people say. Hannah Rawle and the dominie never said so though; not at least in any congratulatory sense. They wondered, nevertheless, each in a characteristic way, and came to wholly diverse conclusions, satisfactory to neither.

"Murder!" was the emphatic asseveration with which Hannah atoned for everybody's else silence, after the first announcement.

The dominie shook his head — at the same time watching Margery, not Hannah, for the effect of his words.

"Not murder? Accident, then! Good Lud! how did it happen?"

Again the dominie shook his head, still anxiously measuring with his eye the mother's power of endurance, as well as that of Angie, who had risen and stood beside Margery, rigid and calm. Hannah also shot a glance at them, an indignant glance. "Are those women made of stone?" she thought; "don't they care what's become of the boy? Has nobody but me any interest in this matter?" and she proceeded with her questioning.

And so, by a few vehement queries, she extracted all that the minister knew — stabbing Margery and Angie with her eyes between whiles, and condemning them for what she thought their unnatural want of feeling.

Want of feeling! As if Hannah knew what torture may precede palsy! what a winter of grief torpor may betoken! Oh! the presumption of those who dare to fathom other souls — to take the measure of another's grief — to weigh human woe! They know as much about it, perhaps, as Hannah knew of the meaning of those glazed, tearless eyes — those mute,

uncomplaining lips — that rigid, patient posture, and no more.

How much the minister knew about it, it is impossible to say. It astonished him, for he had never witnessed such an instance before in all his round of pastoral duty. But he knew enough to respect it. It reacted on him too like a spell, — putting to flight all his harsh dogmas — checking his preconceived condemnation of the crime he had come hither to stigmatize as the unpardonable sin of Scripture; silencing his warning against the spiritual contagion that mere sympathy with the poor criminal might involve; humbling the pride of the preacher, who presumes to sit in judgment; in a word, lifting his theology at a bound to a level with his heart.

Gossip gained nothing from the report of Dominie Van Zandt. "They took it very quietly — they said nothing," was all that curiosity could extract from him; and when, on Sunday next, an unusually large congregation assembled, in anticipation of a hot vindication of the truth, that repeated afflictions in a household are signal proofs of God's relentless anger against those predestined to wrath, many were disappointed at the meekness of his text, — "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it."

For the first time in his life the good man found nothing to say in vindication of God's wrath, or in condemnation of man's guilt. Impressed and awed by a vague sense of mystery, he could only exclaim to himself, or to others, "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out."

CHAPTER XVI.

The Long Watch over.

THERE were three palpable results of this fresh catastrophe in the Rawle family. Angie went home to her father, Margery sank into a nonentity, Hannah ruled the house. There was no motive for Angie's further continuance at the cottage, nor did Margery remonstrate even by a look, when she said, "I will carry our bed upstairs; you will not mind sleeping with *her* now" (pointing to Hannah); "I will go home to-night." The period of watching and suspense was over; that of endurance simply was begun. So long as they were peering into each night's darkness, in expectation of catching some glimpse of the fugitive, so long as they fancied they heard his cry in every whistle of the night wind, they had instinctively looked to each other for aid in some possible emergency; but now that he lay stiff, stark, and still, — now that he had surrendered himself to the last enemy, Death, all lesser powers were disbanded, and the long watch was over. Margery felt that henceforth she could lie down by the side of Hannah — of Hannah, the avenger still in heart, but the avenger disarmed. Angie realized that the necessity for co-operation between herself and Margery was past; that their suffering would be none the less mutual because endured apart, and that her only rightful place was home.

Home! — word of so much meaning to the happy! — of so much more to the miserable! The place where the highest joy is concentrated! the corner in which the deepest grief may hide! the garden where Innocence sports in the sunshine! the only shady spot in which Remorse can find a grave!

Poor Angie! A little while ago so bright, so beautiful, so gay a thing; it seems hard to consign her thus to a dreary tomb. But to the heart crushed out of life, the hopes annihilated, the soul given over to contrition and despair, what

is there left but burial? For awhile we must leave her, then, to solitude, darkness, and the undying worm.

And Margery! O mothers, pity her! Sometimes she went wandering round the house, with that strange restlessness which no change of place can satisfy, no bodily weariness exhaust. Sometimes she sat gazing at one spot for hours; her hands — oh! who does not know the expression of grief-struck hands? No tongue can tell to those whom sorrow has not initiated, — no eye but that of sympathy can detect that mute holding-on to each other on the part of despairing hands. It is the silent griefs that hide thus between the palms; and Margery's grief, from first to last, was dumb. Those continual complaints, those long-drawn sighs, those self-pitying ejaculations which had been her distinguishing characteristic, had all died into the still depth of an unbroken silence. Whether it were caution, or fear, or the very paralysis of despair, her lips henceforth refused the common utterances of sorrow; her bosom heaved no groans; the "O dears!" and the "Ah, me's!" of her former life had shrunk dismayed from the presence of a blasting woe.

Only sympathy could comprehend this, and Hannah Rawle possessed no such spiritual talisman. Hannah was a strong woman. Well might she be. Her nature was one of those that find vent for themselves, and she had never been chafed and worn away in any vital part by emotions that gnaw inwardly and sap the life. Her grief at her husband's death had half-exploded already in fierce invectives and threats against his murderers; and, in like manner, her vexation — for such it might well be termed — at George's wretched fate was destined to find an outlet in alternate reproaches of the poor youth, and regret at his untimely end. She put a constraint upon herself, indeed, during the minister's visit, which was brief. She didn't want any of his consolation, she said; she'd had enough of it. But henceforward she officiated, both outwardly and in her own estimation, as head of the household and chief mourner.

Not that she put on mourning, as the saying is, or claimed

the commiseration of the neighbourhood. Far from it. Nobody wore mourning for Baultie, or Geordie either. Their relations were all too poor, too niggardly, or too primitive for that. Neither did Hannah crave anybody's pity, nor tolerate visits of condolence, which, fortunately, few persons dreamed of paying. But it was she alone who, from this time, presumed to lift the veil which was suffered to rest upon the past. She alone ventured to compare what was, with what had, or might have been, and lament the bitterness of the household lot; thus performing after a fashion her share, and, as she believed, more than her share of the mourning; an office which did not prevent her also usurping the direction of affairs, and by her own native force of character taking immediate precedence of Margery in all things pertaining to their mutual welfare.

"Of course, as things has turned out so misfortunate, I shall jest keep on here 'long with Margery," was her mental resolve. "Margery's a poor, weak critter! Only look at her now — potterin' round, as if she was tryin' to hunt up her scattered wits. She's a poor, broken-down thing, an' don't more'n half know what she's about. Why, she's acted as if she was afeard fur her life ever since they killed my old man, till now; an' now she don't seem to have life enough left in her to feel any great struck up about Geordie. Why, I've seen her take on wuss when the potatoes got scorched agin the bottom o' the pot in the bilin'. It's lucky Geordie's got me to grieve for him" (and a great involuntary tear rolling down her cheek testified to the sincerity with which she fulfilled her office — for Hannah, whose stern, reserved nature allied her to but few, had really loved the lad), — "yes, it's lucky he's got one raal mourner, for his mother hain't got sperit enough to feel any o' the shame or sorrer that she ought ter on his account, an' the gal seems as cool as a cucumber too, considerin' she an' Geordie's been sparkin' together this dozen year."

Margery's helplessness and inefficiency being assumed, and Hannah's prerogative unquestioned from the first, it

naturally devolved on the latter to receive and act upon her brother Dick's report of the result of his investigations into the fact of George's death, with all the attendant circumstances, so far as they were revealed, — such as the identification of the body; the time, manner, and place of the event; and its probable motive and cause.

With respect to the last point only could there be any opportunity for doubt or discussion. The rest resolved itself into a series of statements sufficiently proved, and leaving no ground for further inquiry or hope.

"It's him? You've seen him? He's dead, then? It's all true?" Each of these questions was responded to by a confirmatory nod on the part of Van Hausen, — solemn, awful nods, — a stroke of fate each.

Perhaps it was dread of the effects of his communication; perhaps it was the natural reticence of a man who had looked on things unutterable; possibly it was merely because Hannah, who had put the questions, was keen-eyed and dull of ear — that he nodded, and did not speak. He had come in just at dusk, leaving the horse, on which he had ridden to and from the city since morning, saddled outside. He had laid a clumsy bundle on the table as he entered, and had seated himself on a chair close against the wall.

Hannah groaned aloud; Margery, seemingly playing the second part, only looked and listened in her vacant way. Angie, who had purposely delayed going home until after Van Hausen's anxiously-expected visit, but who dreaded to encounter him face to face, gazed tremblingly out from the corner of a dark passage in the cellar-way, where she had taken refuge on his entrance.

So much had been comprehended in Hannah's brief questions and Van Hausen's nods, that it seemed for a moment as if there was nothing more to ask or answer. Van Hausen took advantage of the pause to feel in his pocket for a second parcel; rise, and lay it beside the larger bundle on the table; and then sit down again. All eyes followed him, and fasten-

ed themselves on the table, burdened as it was with these sad trophies.

"His things?" murmured Hannah.

Dick nodded again.

Margery rose, went to the table, and bent over it.

"Where did he jump off?" was Hannah's next bald question.

Dick shook his head from side to side, intimating that he didn't know.

Margery had, meanwhile, untied the silk handkerchief — George's handkerchief — in which the well-known coat — his coat — was wrapped. Now she drew the outer edges of the handkerchief slowly between her thumb and forefinger, as if measuring it, length and breadth; then unfolded the coat, and, one after another, passed the palm of her hand gently over each of its great silver buttons, — ancestral buttons, — the only relic of old Hans' prosperity that fell to Margery's share. How often she had polished them for Sundays! How sadly the tarnished things needed it now! Then she let the coat drop suddenly from her hands, as if, burdened with a weight of memories, it had proved too heavy for her to hold; but she still hovered over the table.

They all watched her. Angie leaned forward from the cellar-way, in the rear of Dick's chair; with one shrinking eye on him, she strained the other in the direction of Margery.

The poor mother had taken fresh courage, had convulsively unfolded the lesser parcel, and was examining its contents.

"His watch?" asked Hannah of her brother, as Margery grasped the rusty silver time-piece, and the heavy-linked chain and old-fashioned seal rattled with a familiar click, — familiar to the mother's ear long before the younger George was born (for the watch had been his father's — the family heir-loom on the Rawle side).

The question was responded to by another assenting nod from Dick, who, rising, laid his finger impressively on the face of the watch, the rusty hands of which still pointed out

the hour — half-past two. They all shuddered; they knew that *that* was the hour which had sounded George's death-knell.

It was more than the poor mother could bear to look upon. She closed one hand over the watch, jealously hiding it even from her own eyes. Perhaps she dreaded lest the thing, which had once seemed endowed with life and still had power to reveal a truth, might speak out and betray all. However that might be, she clutched it instinctively, gathered up the coat and handkerchief in her feeble, trembling arms, and, without waiting for any further revelation, crept from the room, and went tottering with her burdens up the narrow stairway to George's attic, there to hide these new tokens of her misery in the places where they had once belonged.

Van Hausen drew a long breath when she had gone. His tongue seemed loosened too. Rough-grained as he might be, his childlike simplicity of heart interpreted Margery's condition more truly than Hannah, or even the dominie had done. Touched, as the friends of Job were by the greatness of his calamity, he had not ventured to speak a word unto her, for he saw that her grief was very great.

"What a day's work this has been for a man!" he exclaimed, when she had gone. "Thank God, it's about over."

"Was he much changed?" inquired Hannah, who did not hear her brother's exclamation; but who, in the greater licence afforded by Margery's absence, could no longer restrain her anxiety for the particulars.

"Purty consid'able," said Dick. "Don't ask me! 'Taint no need to say nothin' 'bout it to *her*, nuther," — pointing in the direction where Margery had disappeared.

"Law, she hain't no curiosity, not a mite," said Hannah; "she's jest dumb-founded. How long since it happened, do yer s'pose?"

"Nigh on ter the time he's been missin'. If he'd given himself a chance to come to his senses, he wouldn't ha' done it. But that gal jest sent him to destruction flyin'."

"What gal?"

"That piece o' mischief you've been harbourin' here — that darter o' Cousinses; my cuss on her, an' the cuss of all honest folks! What's that?" and Dick turned suddenly round in his chair.

It was only a movement, — a slight rustling sound in the cellar-way — too slight a sound for Hannah to notice, — and Dick, concluding it was rats, righted himself almost immediately in his seat.

Angie, who had already heard too much, poor thing! waited for no more; but as soon as she had recovered from the shock Dick's words had given her, and made sure that she was undiscovered, crept stealthily down the cellar stairs, and found her way out of the house by an ignominious passage ordinarily used only by the rats, the frequency of whose presence in these quarters had secured and covered her retreat.

"Fudge?" said Hannah, "don't tell me that; the boy wan't such a fool."

"He was, though; an' he ain't the fust man that's been driven to perdition by a woman!"

"Nonsense! You may tell me that till you're black an' blue, Dick; I don't believe it. What in the world could a chit like her do to bring Geordie to sich a pass?"

"Jilt him! Turn the cold shoulder on him! Threaten him! Turn him out o' doors, an' the like."

"My stars!" cried Hannah, firing up and becoming Angie's champion at once, for she saw the drift of Dick's argument, "has a gal got to take up with whoever comes loafin' round, fur fear the feller 'll drown himself? Next thing, like 's not, you'll be blamin' his uncle Baultie an' me for what's happened!"

"Wal, p'raps you was to blame some," growled Dick, bluntly.

"No we wan't, nuther," said Hannah, emphatically, giving herself a mental jerk to clear her conscience of such little scruples as might adhere to it on this point. "What's the

use, Dick, of accusin' the innocent, to say nothin' o' the dead, for the sake o' clearin' the guilty? Jest as if his uncle an' me wouldn't ha' got over anything we had agin the lad as soon as he showed himself a little bit stiddy! Why, Baultie was as low spirited as ever I seen him the night afore he died; an' I more 'n half mistrusted 'twas about the lad, though he never let on a word to me. He'd only held a tight rein with the boy, same as he would with a young colt. No," with another spasmodic resolve, "Baultie wan't responsible, nor the gal nuther. Plaguy fool! why couldn't he show a little more grit? He must ha' had an awful weak streak in him, jest like his mother. If he'd only known how to hold his own, he might ha' come in fur a share in his uncle Baultie's money, — at least in what's left on't, — an' might ha' lived 'long of his mother an' me, an' p'raps ha' married the gal, arter all; who knows? But i'stead o' that, he must needs add sin to sin, an' crown all by destroyin' himself, soul an' body, an' shamin' all his relations inter the bargain. No — you needn't tell me nothin' about it; you allers was soft on Geordie, Dick, an' that jest spiles yer judgment. There's nobody to blame but himself; but there, what's the use of talkin'? The poor lad's dead an' gone, an' there's the end on't."

"Not quite the end," said Dick, in a gruff voice, and with an obstinate expression of face, which showed how little he was convinced or disturbed by his sister's reasoning. "I have my 'pinions, and shall hold on to 'em; but I'm not much of a man fur a talk; what I'm waitin' here for 's to consult with his mother about what 's to be done with the body."

"I vum, I never thought o' that!" said Hannah. "But it's no use consultin' Margery. She wouldn't have a clear idee in the matter. Ain't there any place down ter York for disposin' o' cases like this 'ere. Of course you wouldn't think o' bringin' him home?"

"Wal, I dun know 'bout that."

"Dun know! Why, Dick, what are yer thinkin' on? Bring him here to be panted at, an' not allowed Christian burial; p'raps be placed down there at the cross roads, as a warnin'.

I declare agin, that in the name o' the family an' o' common sense, 'twould make more talk than a leetle, an' be a lastin' disgrace."

"Didn't think o' that!" said Dick, musingly; "don't want to make more talk 'bout the lad than 's necessary. P'raps, arter all, I'd better let the city folks manage same 's usual in these cases. They'll give him six foot o' ground somewher', I s'pose; an' that's all anybody can make use on."

"Consecrated ground?" asked Hannah, emphatically.

"Consecrated! yes. The arth 's the Lord's — the whole on't," said Dick. "The Stein's Plains folks can narrer down their buryin'-ground to suit the width o' their notions. But the Lord Almighty asks no questions; an', trust me, I'll find a place for the poor lad somewher' in His soil, and leave him in the care of the original Proprietor to wait until the day of the resurrection."

"And the Lord have marcy on his soul!" said Hannah, with a groan that implied the hopelessness of her prayer.

"I ain't afraid but He will," responded Dick, with jealous warmth. "Anyway, the next world can't be harder on him than this has been."

"His own fault," said Hannah, resolutely.

"That's as folks may think," growled Van Hausen; then anxious to avoid another argument, and willing to be spared another interview with Margery, he continued, "Wal, anyhow, I s'pose we've settled this 'ere matter, so I'll go 'long."

He had not ridden many rods down the road when he overtook Angie, who had not yet gained the shelter of home. Fleeing as she did in secret, she had come away without shawl or hood, and had thrown her dress over her head as a protection from the keen winter wind. She looked forlorn enough, making her way through the snow, for there had been a second storm, and the cross roads were almost impassable; but her appearance became more wild and eerie still, as hearing his horse's step, she gave a quick glance behind her in the dusk and saw who was approaching. "The cruel man, he will ride me down!" was her first thought, and

crouching beneath the folds of her dress, she sprang aside into a deep drift. The horse shied suddenly, frightened no doubt at the unearthly apparition, with its fluttering garments. Instinctively she dropped the disguise which had so startled the horse, thus baring her head and shoulders to the piercing wind. Van Hausen seized his heavy whip. "He will strike me dead!" she inwardly exclaimed, and looked up imploringly, her hands clasped together as if deprecating his anger, her hair streaming in the wind.

He saw her, and he did not see her; he grasped the whip, but it was only, as it proved, to strike the horse, and riding off at double speed, he left her there as unnoticed as if she had been a stone. And to a stone her heart seemed to turn at this neglect. He had used no violence, — he had only annihilated her with his scorn. It was no mistake, no mere suspicion on her part, for as then, so again and again in the future, — he never seemed to see her, — let him encounter her where or when, and they often met, he never appeared to be in the least degree conscious of her presence.

No consummate actor ever played a part so well. No malice nor disdain experienced elsewhere so stung her to the quick, as the unpremeditated revenge that had grown naturally out of this strong man's deep disgust. Long years of obloquy could not teach her more fully, than she felt at this moment, how utterly she had died to human favour, and thus to the world.

No wonder that she hurried home to bury herself in that consecrated spot, — all that is left to her on earth. Well for her, too, that the earth is the Lord's — the whole of it. In His care let her spirit await a resurrection, and may He have mercy on *her* soul!

CHAPTER XVII.

A Winter of the Heart.

GOD'S love, Christ's peace, the presence of the Comforter, — such are the solaces of afflicted saints. The unsanctified heart cannot repose in these, and submissively accept its pain. Still it is not without its helpers. The sun which shines on the evil and the good, and the rain which falls on the just and the unjust, are types of many blessings common to all the children of Earth. Time, with healing on its wings, and work crowding hard upon work, soothe the heaviest griefs, or drive them away by force, and thus God in His providence shows mercy even to the unthankful and the evil. "What can time do for me?" cries the sufferer in his first agony. "Will not the cause of my sorrow continue for ever the same?" Vain questions! which time alone can answer, but which it does answer day by day, as the heart becomes used to its burden; then feels it lightened, perhaps at last altogether shakes off the load.

But even time is but half a power, bereft of its coadjutor, work. "I will work no more," is the rebellious resolve; "I will merely fold my hands and weep." But necessity presses at first as a cruel task-master, then wears the aspect of a friend, and at last proves itself a deliverer. And so even earthly agencies beneficently triumph over pain, and the head bowed low by the storm is raised again to meet the sunshine.

Let us see what these provisions of mercy have done for Angie.

Winter changed to spring. The months went heavily, still they went. They brought occupation with them too — plenty of it; for sickness was added to poverty, and labour to anxiety, in the farmhouse of Mr. Cousin.

Old Happy Boose fell ill and died; and in nursing the faithful servant, and performing the household drudgery

besides, Angie had little rest by night or day. She went through her tasks, indeed, like a machine; but like a machine, she never faltered nor complained. That Angie was able thus automatically to pursue the round of everyday duty, her usefulness unimpaired by the terrible shocks she had sustained, only confirmed what was evidenced in the first stages of the conflict, that the necessity for action is the parent of self-control, and thus the preserver alike of reason and of health. But for the absolute demands that were made upon her that winter in her home, Angie's excitable temperament might have become so wrought upon, that her career would have ended in wasting disease or madness. As it was, God gave her earthly work to do, and her physical powers of endurance were brought out, and her senses maintained in their rightful equilibrium. Thus the hardening process commenced during the frosts of Christmas, and by spring she was inured to her lot. Inured but not reconciled. There is one thing which time and work have no power to put to flight, for I dare not say that remorse can thus be banished or set aside. It is subject to a contrary law from that which rules in all other forms of anguish. Earth and its agencies have no mission here. Only Heaven's touch can heal this inner smart, and Angie's remorse burned on.

She had come too near to sin to escape its retribution. Great crimes had overshadowed her with their horror, and a vague sense of participation in them had taken possession of her, and would not be driven away. Conscience was ever pointing down the gulf in which a soul had perished, and accusing her of having hurried it on to its doom. True, the crime was his, but it was she who had sharpened the instrument for the deed; she who had lit the fires of jealousy and desperation in which he had hardened himself for acts of violence and blood. True, she had only trifled with a loving heart as thousands trifle daily, and never wake to any consciousness of wrong, far less of actual crime. But only in the light of fatal consequences do we see the power of our own misdeeds. Angie's eyes were opened, and she saw what

she had done, — saw more than she had done, — for imagination lent itself to memory and aggravated every offence. Volumes could never detail the windings of her mind as it roamed through all the passages of the past, rehearsing the devotion, the tenderness, the patience of years on George's part; the tyranny, the petulance, the caprice on hers; and speculating as to their possible bearing on the young man's character and destiny; her reflections always ending in a cold shudder as she recalled the ill-timed scorn, the bitter reproaches, the mocking laugh into which she had been betrayed on the night of the ball, and which had, as she felt assured, put the finishing stroke to the young man's fate.

But though time and toil were no antidote to this poisoned sting which always lay in wait for her peace of mind, they in some degree controlled its action and modified its influence upon her outward life.

Goethe relates a fanciful story of an adventurous barber, who, for the sake of an alliance with a princess of the pigmy race, consented to a transformation from his own manly proportions to those of the minutest dwarfs. The process of contraction, which was simultaneous with the assumption of a magic ring, consisted of one terrible wrench, which threatened to tear him limb from limb, after which he found himself dwarfed indeed, and subject to the unimagined, and, as they proved, unendurable conditions of his new lot, but free from the first agony of his metamorphose.

The shock with which Angie was thrust from the heights of vanity and self-satisfaction, to the depths of conscious degradation and remorse, was an experience of the moral nature not unlike that which the unfortunate barber suffered in the flesh. As in his case, too, though her after-condition was one of helplessness and torment, the wrench she had endured in the transformation proved but temporary. As day after day passed on, her first bewilderment and horror gave place to a dull and settled misery. She became accustomed to the thought of Geordie as lost, — eternally lost; of herself, as in the same hopeless state; of the past, as a burden from which

there was no escape, and of the future, as promising nothing but a continuation of pain. She whose moral mirror had heretofore reflected a gay figure, flaunting in holiday finery, recognized herself through the dirt and rags in which self-contempt had clothed her; she, who had danced through life with Hope for her partner, now sat down with Despair for her sole companion. And she became used to the Cinderella garb — used to the sad companionship; or if habit failed to inure her to them, hard work came to its assistance. The cold perspiration, the momentary palsy of the heart which sometimes stole over her, or seized upon her in her hours of deep despondency, were sure to be speedily dispelled by the demand for her services, here, there, and everywhere!

In constant attendance upon her father, the household, and Happy Boose, she had little leisure to take the gauge of her own lot, real or imaginary; and even remorse found its best solace at the wash-tub, the oven, the kitchen-hearth, the mob and broom, and the sick-bed of the old negress.

If there was any virtue in the half-sullen submission, the enforced drudgery, the compelled self-contempt, which at present constituted the chief features of Angie's life, it did not manifest itself outwardly. Whatever change there was in her was apparently a change for the worse. She still had a word of encouragement for old Hap, a constrained smile for her father, a helping hand to spare now and then for the two old women at the cottage; but the grace, the beauty, the charm, that hung around her former life, had all been swept away by the blast, and no new virtues had yet blossomed in their place. The seeds might be there; but there is no sweetness, no beauty in seeds, and besides they lie a long while underground. It was winter with her yet, and her life was very desolate and bare. Poor thing!

Her father scarcely noticed the change, neither did old Hap. The one was ailing, depressed, and nervous himself, from the effect of recent events; what else could he expect

from *her*? and the other was dying, groaning her whole life away in mortal pain; and every other agony was but a dim reflection of her own. It was too dark in the farmhouse that winter for shadows to be seen anywhere.

Nor were there any observers from the outside world. So engrossing were Angie's duties, so utter her seclusion, that from Christmas time until spring, she never went farther from home than the widow Rawle's cottage, a daily visit to which, usually paid at sundown, was less a recreation than a religious rite, so painful were her associations with the place and its inmates. And in spite of the curiosity felt concerning her, the undertaker, who went some time in April to take the measure for Happy's coffin, was the first among the village gossips who could boast of having had a glimpse of Angie since Geordie made away with himself. Most of the neighbours had kept aloof; at first, "from principle," they said, "to show their opinion of her;" later, perhaps, from shame; we will hope so, for shame's sake. Even the village doctor had not obtained an entrance. Old Hap's case was of too hopeless a nature for his skill, and besides Hap had no faith in him, was skilled, as she affirmed, "in yarbs," and chose to doctor herself.

Spring-time, which brings back the birds, turns the grass green, and coaxes the flowers out into the sunshine; Spring, which pays for all that winter costs, and settles up Nature's account with man; spring-time brought release to old Happy, and the price of all her pain was peace.

But the winter of poor Angie's life had not yet made a spring for her. All was cold, hard, dark in the soil of her stricken heart. No seed of hope had sprouted there, no ray of sunshine, melting the winter snow, had diffused its moisture through the dry crust that enshrouded her soul in gloom.

Even in its exterior aspect spring looked less promising than usual this year at the Cousin farm. The old Frenchman, so far from recovering his elasticity of spirits and of limb in proportion as the genial season advanced, seemed to droop

and wither under its influence. He was no longer able to potter about the place and plan schemes of improvement and profit, which, however chimerical in themselves, and however imperfectly carried out, were at least more promising than utter neglect. What if his vineyards had proved a failure, except as they afforded him grapes enough one favourable year to treat his neighbours to a little very bad wine of his own manufacture? What if his fields of peppermint and spearmint had never produced enough oil to pay the cost of his mint-still? What if his flock of sheep, imported from France, had dwindled down to a few pet lambs of Angie's? What if every year found him more and more out of pocket, and with the farm more and more embarrassed and mortgaged? Practically speaking, these things were ruinous, but experimental farming is always hopeful; there is a healthy excitement in novelty; and in riding the annual hobby, and snuffing future harvests there was forgetfulness for the sanguine Frenchman of his long arrears of indebtedness, and blindness to the poverty which would otherwise have been staring him in the face. This year, for the first time, he was without a scheme. It was a bad sign.

At last, just as the summer days were at the longest, the farmers the "hardest worked" at haying, and their "women folks" kept busiest in kitchen and dairy, just at the season when nobody had leisure to be interrupted with anybody's else concerns, the dormant curiosity of the neighbourhood as to "how things were goin' on at Cousines," was suddenly aroused, and had moreover a chance to be gratified. There had been a death up at the farmhouse in the night! The old gentleman himself had been called away! he was to be buried to-morrow; and after that, of course there must be a general breaking up, for everything was going to rack and ruin up there. So ran the gossip.

The general breaking up, thus looked forward to, could of course be nothing else than the unearthing of poor Angie, the only victim left to suffer from the coming chaos. With her last protector gone, it was but too evident that the poor

refugee would at length be driven from her hiding-place, and compelled to face the light.

Day after day the careless passers-by had seen Mr. Cousin sitting in the sun at his doorway, his limbs swathed in flannel, and his camlet cloak wrapped round his shoulders, looking out vacantly on his untilled fields, and shivering in spite of the summer's heat. Some said old Cousin was getting gouty; they guessed his habits were bad; others, that he was lazy; he had never been good for much. Nobody suspected that a death chill had got into his bones, and that his last day's work on earth was done.

It was known that the farm-boy had taken himself off weeks before, that the one-eyed horse had been seized by Jock the miller in payment for grain, and that the pig had gone to offset the butcher's account; it was even whispered that the farming tools had either been stolen or sold off the place, and that the old "equipage" now sported by Farmer Rycker, had been bargained for with Angie for a song. But no one knew — no, they *never* knew (for even death and the funeral did not reveal that) how Angie had plotted and planned to keep starvation from the door; how, when everything else that could be disposed of was gone, she had made her way to New York and back on foot, and had obtained, as the price of the three silver teaspoons and her mother's wedding ring, money enough to purchase a few necessaries; and how, when some weeks later the means were again wanting to obtain medicine for the sick man, she had cropped off her own beautiful hair — every lock of it — and sent it secretly to the wig maker in Broadway, who made and dressed Mr. Cousin's wigs, and who had once offered her a handsome sum for her jetty curls, little suspecting that the time would ever come when she would bring her mind to parting with them. No, and they never knew the bitter relief it brought to the poor girl's pain, as she looked on her dead father's face, to reflect how next to impossible it would have been for her to keep him alive with nourishment, even if she could have baffled disease; and how dreadful a thing it would

have been to him to have outlived the gentleman and died a pauper.

Had they known all this at Stein's Plains, there were kind-hearted people among them who would have been stirred to sympathy and action in behalf of Angie and her father. As it was, many, remembering what a genial social nature the old man had, and what a kind word for everybody, felt a pang of mortification and regret that he should have passed away without their neighbourly intervention or knowledge. Most of them were satisfied, however, with the reflection, "he must have gone off sudden at last, or we should ha' heard on't, sartin; and anyhow, people that didn't come to meetin' and lived as close as mice in a cheese, couldn't expect the neighbourhood to keep account of their doin's." Finally, all reassured their consciences with the resolve to make amends for past neglect, by "puttin' aside everything else that was pressin' and drivin' at this season o' year, an' makin' a pint of attendin' the funeral."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Voice of Public Opinion.

THE neighbours, even from their distant point of view, had prophesied truly. Everything had long been going to rack and ruin at the Cousin farm, and a general breaking-up was now inevitable. Diedrich Stein, as a matter of course, was in at the dividing of the spoils. He did not openly appear as holder of the mortgage on the estate, which was foreclosed the very day after the old Frenchman's death, but somehow he had a hand in the proceeding and, as it proved, reaped the profits. He made out the inventory of personal property too; practice had rendered him an adept in that sort of thing. He knew how to put a light appraisal on everything that could possibly be made serviceable at the tavern; and although Mr. Cousin's floating debts must have been inconsiderable, and there were still articles of value on the place, it so hap-

pened that, between Stein and an attorney who had the settling of the estate, nothing was left for Angie except the meagre furniture of her own room; which was respected less from courtesy than from a vague notion these harpies had that it was an inheritance from her mother and could not be meddled with.

Hers was now a case either for charity or the workhouse, and the former prevailed; though it could not be said to be charity alone which threw open a door to the orphan. Self-interest gave it a slight push. Hannah Rawle liked Angie; she had detected her capability the first time she saw her put on the teakettle; she recognized in her none of the faults of which she had been accused in the neighbourhood. She had acquitted her, as we have seen, of all blame in Geordie's case, just as she acquitted herself and Baultie. Instinctively she had become a sort of champion of the girl. She saw the need of her too, for Margery's remnant of energy was gone, her own limbs were getting stiff and rheumatic, and she shrewdly calculated on the gain an infusion of young life would be to the household. "S'posen you come an' stop with us a spell?" was the way in which she worded her invitation. Margery's silent face said "Do!" And Angie came. The spell was never broken; it lasted, with only slight interruptions, to the end of their lives.

That the nearest relations of George Rawle should thus open their doors to Angie Cousin was a crying aggravation to the gossip of the neighbourhood. Eventually it told greatly in Angie's favour; but at first the old women were pronounced the "victims o' that gal's lyin' arts," were abused for their indifference to Geordie's misfortune, or, among the more charitably-disposed, were declared to be in their dotage. Only after time had made their relations familiar, and experience had proved them harmonious, did the public condescend to approve the arrangement which gave Angie and the two widows a home together.

They were poor — very poor. Stein, that long-fingered Stein, had virtually robbed them all. The law had helped

him; somehow the law always seemed to be on his side. He had inherited, through his wife (who, though otherwise a mere kitchen hand, was a convenient link here), the better part of what remained of Baultie's property. If there was a will, it had disappeared with the other papers, and everything but the widow's thirds — a mere pittance, as it proved, under Stein's management — went to the family at the tavern. Van Hausen tried to interfere here, to persuade Margery that George's death took place later than that of his uncle; that she herself could prove him to have been living until half-past two o'clock on the morning after the murder, and that she might yet establish a claim as her son's heir; but Margery shrank from the subject, shook her head in a way that forbade legal inquiry into these dreadful particulars, and was altogether so shattered and distressed by any allusion to the subject, that Dick dropped the matter and forbore alluding to it again, though he and Hannah indulged themselves in vehement invectives against Stein and his covetous practices. To crown his other grasping acts, this unnatural brother began to demur regarding Margery's rights to the continued occupation of her cottage and the adjacent land, claiming it to be an entailed estate, the heirship to which, in default of George's life, became vested in Peter and Polly Stein; and this question, which involved the very roof over the old women's heads, was only compromised by their consenting to pay to Stein an annual tribute of half the wood cut on the piece of timber land which constituted the only remnant of the farm.

What remained after the ravages thus made on their property was so little, that they were at all times sadly pinched, and occasionally suffered from want. The first winter after Angie came to live with them was one of scarcely less privation and anxiety than she had lately endured in her own home. But for the share of Van Hausen's earnings, which found its way in one form or another into their dwelling and relieved the case, and one other source of aid hereafter to be mentioned, these poor women might have frozen or starved.

The next season things went better with them, and the event justified Hannah Rawle's expectations from Angie. Labouring under the direction of the old woman, whose mental energies were unimpaired, and whose limbs were less cramped than the preceding season, the youthful member of the household wrought willingly, and to good purpose; and such was the result of their mutual perseverance and thrift, that they not only secured daily subsistence, but laid by a little store for the necessities of the coming winter.

Between them they cultivated a kitchen garden, raised vegetables and herbs, and prepared dried apples and peaches for the market. Angie kept bees, turkeys, and hens, and went regularly to the market-town, where she exchanged the produce of poultry-yard, garden, and hive for family necessities, or sometimes a little hard cash. A few sheep which fed in their only bit of pastureland by day, and were carefully folded by Angie every night, furnished the wool which kept Margery's spinning-wheel going all the summer day, and gave occupation to all their knitting-needles during the long winter evenings. Thus united in their labours and sharing the same round of petty cares, these three women, thrown together less by choice than by the shock of calamities, drifted, as it were, by whirlwinds upon the same shoal, had now one home, one purse, one lot.

And so they lived in each other's sight by day, and sat round the same fireside at night, familiar to each other's gaze, acquainted, as each believed, with the experiences that had moulded the other's destiny. And yet the knowledge they possessed was the merest fraction of the whole. There were depths in each heart which none but God could know, much less could sound.

Look at them; look closely at these three lives, apparently so blended into one, in reality so isolated. Margery Rawle, moving about like an automaton, silent, calm, seemingly resigned, but dying by degrees of the terrible thought that she was the mother of darkness, misery, and crime;

that the life she had given had murdered life, — more than one life, — another's — its own — hers.

Angie, scorned and pitied by the world as the breaker of an honest heart, and herself broken-hearted, meekly bearing this obloquy and shame, if so she might help to shield her dead lover from a more terrible name than that of a suicide.

And the widow of the murdered man, stern, erect, determined, — a bitter mourner for the dead, whom she now never named, — often wearying of her own life, and secretly wishing to be at rest, but bearing up, in the belief that she was destined some day to be the instrument of a righteous retribution, and clinging to the other two as in some sort capable of corroborating her testimony, and ensuring the gallows its victim; while they saw in her hand the uplifted sword that might any day smite the last stronghold of their affections, and often trembled at the sound of that voice which was to them the trump of the avenger.

For while all other horrors were laid away among the things of the past, that one possibility of the future — discovery — continued always to haunt the hearts of these three sufferers from the crime; to the one an eager hope, — to the other two a mortal dread. The one cherished her life that she might aid in laying bare the guilt and condemning the guilty; either of the other two would have died to save poor Geordie's name from further infamy.

And the thought of each heart was secret.

Types of mortality! God setteth the solitary in families, and gives man a social sphere to move in. But each soul still dwells alone with God. Deep down in its own consciousness is a world no friend nor foe can fathom. Will these things rise in the resurrection? If so, what loves, what hates, what memories, what fears, what mistakes, what sorrows, what secret sins will flash their light on the mysterious past and lay heart bare to heart!

Meanwhile God knows all. All this sin of ours? Oh, terrible thought! How shall we escape His wrath?

How? *Because* He knows *all*, — the conflicts, the tempta-

tions, the agony, the tears, the repentance. Therefore He loves and spares, and hence, as one has touchingly said, "Redemption is the charity of God." And the price of this redemption — this charity? At what cost shall it be ours? The answer is written in the Book, — "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." God, who knows all, pardons all. Pardon, then, short-sighted mortal, the things that you know, for the sake of things that you know not.

It seemed as if these three women comprehended in some degree the mystery, for by tacit consent they lived together in an unquestioning faith. Calamity had fallen on them all, and silence was its handmaid. Each had her spectral thought, and shuddered at it; but each accepted her destiny, bowed beneath it, and complained not. And time wore on.

Their household life being such as I have described it, one may well conceive that they had little time or inclination for intercourse with their neighbours. Although Angie's repugnance to society was but partially overcome, it was chiefly through her that social relations were maintained between the inmates of the cottage and the world outside. Occasionally Van Hausen made them brief visits, and now and then some market-gardener or travelling pedler called at the door, and had occasion to transact some small matters of trade with Hannah, who always proved herself, as report said, "smart as ever at a bargain." But as Angie went frequently to market, purchased whatever was required from the country grocery-store, and, ever since the appeal made to her by the dominie, went regularly to church, it was inevitable that her former familiarity with the neighbourhood should be to some degree resumed, or new and different relations be established on the basis of her altered character and circumstances.

It was hard for poor Angie at first, however, and awkward and trying even for the best-intentioned of her neighbours. The Stein's Plains people were not the most hard-hearted or censorious people in the world. It was love and pity for poor Geordie, after all, which made them so bitter against her

who had been, as they believed, his ruin. Had the cases been reversed they would have remembered her with tenderness, and scorned and hated him as the destroyer. Nor did Angie expect or claim any more lenient treatment at their hands; did they know all that she knew, they might shudder more at the thought of George; but they would scarcely fear any the less the moral contagion of her presence. As one secretly tainted with disease secludes himself from dread of polluting the surrounding atmosphere, so she shrank morbidly from the society to which she felt herself an alien. Her former associates had no need to flee from her; she instinctively avoided them.

So it happened that for several Sundays after she resumed her attendance at church, she went and came speechless, and unspoken to by anyone. Several had meant to make a point of bowing to her; a few, moved either by kindness or curiosity, had prepared something to say; but she gave them no opportunity, slipping into her place after most of the congregation were assembled for the service, and at its close escaping in advance of her own sex, and gliding through the little crowd of men outside the porch without looking to right or left, — her cold, reserved expression forbidding anyone to address her.

There was no embargo, however, upon the eyes and ears of the congregation; and their tongues, when loosened for one another's benefit, in the porch or on the homeward drive, were not slow in making their comments upon an object so open to gossip as Angie had become.

"Did you see Angie Cousin?" whispers one.

"My! ain't she changed, though?" is the prompt reply.

"She takes good care to keep out o' the way," cries a third.

"Well she may — she ought to," affirms a fourth.

"Who pities her?" exclaims an implacable voice.

"She needed to be taken down," is the moral conclusion flung out at this.

"Her beauty's all gone," says Susan Rycker, triumphantly, to Joel Beck.

"Looks as yeared as a young calf, what with her pale face and them short curls o' hern," responds the honest youth who has had the reputation of "gawking round after Angie" all through his boyhood, but who scorns her now for poor Geordie's sake.

"I allers said she'd come out at the little end o' the horn," remarks Dame Rycker, glancing complacently at Susan, who has just arrived at the great end, — Joel having yesterday proposed.

"I bless the Lord no darter o' mine ever made herself such a town warnin'!" is the pious thanksgiving of the chief of the Pharisees.

Such was the burden of the murmur through which Angie flitted, ghost-like, for half-a-dozen successive Sundays; a manœuvre on her part which was instinctive, almost involuntary, — disappointing not only those among her former friends, who, instigated perhaps by the dominie's example at the funeral, had meant to have a neighbourly chat with her, but disappointing the dominie, who looked vainly for her among the crowd gathered around the porch; disappointing even Angie herself, who yearned for a kind word from the good pastor, but still could not resist the impulse to escape from the church before he had had time to reach the foot of the pulpit stairs. She had the refreshment of seeing his eye turn always in her direction when she took her seat, with a look that was benediction; her single drop of dew for the week — the only one. That alone repaid her for the effort she made in coming, but she thirsted for more. At last, circumstances befriended her. A thunder-shower came up during service-time, and settled into a steady rain. The roads were flooded, the rain still pouring heavily when the congregation were dismissed. As usual on such occasions, the men and boys who were accustomed to take their station outside, crowded the porch and blocked up the passage, and the women, thronging down the aisle, were squeezed into

narrow quarters. For awhile, Angie's exit was forbidden, and she found herself involved with the crowd, who were too busy pinning up dresses, covering bonnets with handkerchiefs, and otherwise preparing to meet the storm, to take much notice of her.

Some who lived at a distance were inviting others to take seats in their wagons; sons and brothers were elbowing their way in to announce these rustic equipages; sisters and mothers, well pinned up and prepared, were making their way out, beckoning to other members of their households to follow. Few lived farther from the church than Angie, but no one invited her to ride even any portion of the way. There was some excuse for them. The minister had just been preaching about separating oneself from sinners. He had drawn terribly sharp lines, had painted eternal fires, and warned the virtuous against guilty contagion. And Angie was about the guiltiest person they knew of just now — the most marked subject for avoidance. One or two, indeed looked at her askance; there was a whispered consultation near her; but Angie, catching sound of her own name, did not await the result of the conference. She saw a gap in the crowd, darted through, and set out for home, in spite of the rain, just before Dominie Van Zandt, for whom everybody made way, gained the door, and looked anxiously up and down the road. She had no umbrella, and was thinly clad; it was almost impossible to avoid the puddles; in a few moments she must be inevitably drenched with the rain. One wagon, driven carelessly past, nearly ran over her; another bespattered her with mud. There is something pitiful in being wet through, something mortifying in being drabbled with mud, something forsaken in being on foot and exposed to the storm when everybody else is protected and comfortable. Angie has pride enough left to be more conscious of the neighbours' wagons coming up behind than she is of the rain; sensitiveness enough to feel the familiar eyes looking down upon her more acutely than she feels the cold east wind that is blowing. So she walks fast, and gets the more

spattered and wet for doing so, and cannot hope to outstrip the carriages after all. Even now, there is one coming up at full speed; how the old vehicle rattles! every spoke in its wheels seems alive! Now it is alongside — ah! it stops! It is the dominie's antique "shay."

"Jump in! my dear — jump in out of the rain!" cries the old man, who has himself alighted, and whose broad-cloth is exposed to the torrent while he assists Angie into the vehicle with the gallantry of a century ago. "There, let me button up the boot on your side! That is right; now we are snug!" and he chirrups to his old nag.

The dominie is going quite out of his way this rainy afternoon, too! Fie on you, farmer this and deacon that, who are coming up just behind! You who live near might have given the orphan a lift so easily, and saved your parson the trouble.

But he does not seem to think it a trouble. How kindly he talks to her! How careful he is not to notice that she is dripping at all points, like a wet umbrella! How fast he drives, so as to deposit his damp passenger at her home as quickly as possible!

"I have watched for you every Sunday, my child," he says. "It has done my heart good to see you in your old seat; but you have never given me a chance to speak to you. Why do you run away so?"

"I don't run from *you*, sir," Angie answers, with emphasis.

"Ah, yes! I understand; you don't like to meet the congregation. Ah, yes! — well, that's natural, I suppose — but not a good thing for you, though; no, not a good thing. You live too much alone, and with the old people. Come and see *us* some day, my dear; come and see Mrs. Van Zandt, she'll be very glad to see you. But she's old, too," he continued, as if the thought took him by surprise; "yes, and paralytic, poor dear soul! It's hard for me to realize that. But never mind," he added, encouragingly, "she's cheerful and patient. It will do you good to see her; it does everybody good, always. We're both old. I didn't think of that when I asked you to

come; but it will be a change. We'll make it as pleasant to you as we can, and perhaps your young fingers can do a good turn for Mrs. Van Zandt; so be sure and come!" And, to make the matter sure, he named a day.

How this adroit hint that she might be of use wrought upon Angie; how she accepted the invitation; how it opened the door to that influence of the old couple which was henceforth like summer showers to the dry ground of her life, belongs to that sacred history of friendship which can never be written. Like God's fountain in the desert, it is often mysterious in its source; small in its beginnings, but steals into the heart of existence; wanders through all its mazes, widening as it goes; waters and enriches at every step of its progress, and never pauses in its work of beneficence until it is merged at last in that sea of boundless love which rounds the universe.

What the old couple were to Angie was best shown by the fruits of the renovation to which their kindness proved the life-spring.

The most tangible of these fruits, and that which appealed most directly to the material mind of Hannah, were the profits of the needlework which the parson and his wife contrived, out of the poverty of the parsonage, to pay Angie liberally for doing, and the superfluities from the annual donation party, which helped the inmates of the cottage to eke out a subsistence that first winter of their united experience. A less substantial, but not less marked effect of the countenance bestowed on Angie at the parsonage, was the growing charity for her which it excited in the neighbourhood, as well as an increasing confidence on her part in the general good-will. It never again happened that she was exposed to rain, snow, or sunstroke, for want of invitations to take a seat in somebody's chaise or wagon on Sundays; and on market-days the farmers, living farther up the cross-road, frequently offered her a place in their wagons, either in going or returning. At first Angie was chary of accepting these hospitalities, but hers was not a nature to resist kindness or harbour suspicion. With the

children especially, among whom she — like her father, or perhaps partly for his sake — had always been a prime favourite, her former relations were easily resumed: their eager petition, "Ride with us, Angie, — ride with us;" or their contentions for the place next her, either in pew or wagon, were too coaxing to be resisted. The aged friends of Margery and Hannah, too, with their weekly anxiety concerning the old widows' health, were sure to be pleased with her grateful acknowledgment of their inquiries; and all, of every age, softened in their judgment of her as time threw past events into the background, and brought virtues of hers, both old and new, into prominence.

I have made the voice of common gossip a rough index to her social standing at various points in my story. Hear now what public opinion had to say of her some three years later than any period yet touched upon. The dialogue I quote took place between Briny Rycker and the mother of six boys before mentioned.

"Was Angie Cousin to meetin'?" was the opening remark from the latter.

"Yes; but she looked real dragged out."

"And no wonder; I think they've imposed upon her up at Beck's; she's 'most killed herself nussin' that baby."

"Law! she didn't seem to think it any hardship. She happened in there sort of by accident, jest as the baby was taken bad with the snuffles. Hannah sent her to see Joel about killing their pig; but when she saw how bad on't the baby was, she took right hold, jest as she always does."

"Poor little feller! How many days was that afore he died?"

"Three — three days and nights that Angie Cousin never had her clothes off."

"Why, where was his mother, I want to know?"

"Susin? Why, between you and me, she gave out and went to bed. She cried, and said she couldn't bear to see him suffer so; and she managed to bring on the dysterics, and her

mother and Miss Beck had just as much as they could do to keep her quiet."

"And left poor Angie to do all the tending o' that sick child?"

"Wal! it didn't matter much; after the first day he wouldn't go to nobody else — she tended him handy-like, you see; there's nobody like her with chil'ern. As for Susin, — wal, p'raps I ought not to say so, but she's about the shiftlessest piece ever I did see."

"So Angie was the only one that could quiet that dyin' child! I declare, she's jest like her dear old father. How he did use to pet my boys! There's Sam remembers him now, jest as if it was only yesterday that he used to coax him with candy and such like."

"Why," said Miss Briny, "you ought to have seen that little feller and her the night afore he died. It was a real touching sight the way she'd walk up and down with him by the hour, and he no light weight either; and when he got kind of quiet and she laid him on the bed, she couldn't move an inch from him but he'd scream out. The little thing dropped off sudden at last. Why, 'twan't half-an-hour afore he drew his last breath that Miss Beck see him a smilin' at Angie, and a twistin' one o' her curls round his little fat fingers. He had revulsions just afterwards, and they'd hardly time to call the folks 'fore he was stretched out like a poor little dead bird."

"An' she fixed him for the grave and all, so I've heerd."

"Everything; she didn't want any help, she said. She washed and dressed him, and curled his hair as purty as could be 'fore his mother saw him again; and he did look like a picter, for he wan't wasted a mite."

"Wal I declare! she 's a wonderful gal. I couldn't do it for no child myself, and I the mother o' six."

"She was always the capablest creetur in the world," remarked Briny.

"Yes; but it's a different sort o' things she hand to now, from what it was once. There seems to be nothin' but

what she can bring her mind to since she see sufferin' herself."

"She's a real subdued character," said Miss Briny, "an' not one o' the selfish sort, neither."

"She jest devotes herself to those old women, they say, and yet she finds time to tend babies, an' nuss sick folks, and go a nuttin' with the chil'en; everybody depends on her for 'mergencies like that at Beck's; and as for Mis' Van Zandt, she can't seem to get along more'n a week to time without her."

"I don't know what would ha' become o' poor Mis' Stein if it hadn't been for Angie," remarked Briny. "'Twas winter time, you know, when she was taken down with her last sickness, and there was nobody to do a thing to make her comfortable. Stein had no more consideration for her than for an old churn that was past use. Peter was drunk as a sot all the time, and a disgrace to the neighbourhood; and as for Polly, — wal, the Lord knows where she was or is; the least thought or said about Polly the better."

"Poll has never once shown herself hereabout, has she?" spoken mysteriously.

"Never; not even at her mother's funeral."

"Do you s'pose they've any idea of what's become of her?"

"I don't know in the least. Stein went to York two or three times, so I've heerd, and tried to hunt her up. P'raps he found her; anyhow, he never let on a word about her to anybody, as I can learn."

"The neighbourhood was cheated for awhile with the notion that she was larnin' the millinery-trade; but nobody believes that now, I s'pose."

"Nobody's quite such a fool, I reckon. My sister-in-law did go to York two or three year ago, calkerlatin' to come across Polly at some milliner's in the Bowery, and consult her about a new bunnet. But she wasn't to be found in any of those places. I hear, though, she has been seen, a year or two back, in places a good deal less respectable. I don't

think anybody doubts what has become of her, or is much surprised either; she was always a sarcy jade."

"Poor Mis' Stein!" said the other, with a sigh, "what a hard time she's had on't with such a family as her'n!"

"Wal, Angie was like a darter to her," resumed Mis' Briny. "She wan't under any obligations in that quarter; and they say Hannah called her all the fools in the world for slavin' herself over Mis' Stein, when if Stein hadn't been such a wretch of a miser, he might ha' hired somebody to nuss his wife."

"Don't you 'magine he paid her anything for bein' off an' on there all winter?"

"Paid her? Not he. Why, he wouldn't let 'em have a fire in his wife's chamber, nor a lamp to burn at night, nor any kind o' nourishment that was fit for a poor sick thing like her. Angie used to watch there nights, to my certain knowledge, when she could hardly keep herself from freezin', and then used to run home in the mornin', and make some broth or cook up some little thing or other for Mis' Stein's breakfast. Stein never even thanked her, but she had the dyin' woman's blessin', if that's any comfort, — and the good word o' the whole neighbourhood. As I heerd Miss Beck say at the funeral, it was a real Christian deed, and the more so because the Steins, as a family, had been no friends to her or hern. But Angie Cousin don't stand on that; she's a real forgivin' disposition; amiable-like, jest as her father was afore her, — else," in a confidential tone, "she wouldn't ha' patronized so with my sister Rycker an' the Becks in the baby's sickness. I must say, they used to turn the cold shoulder on her, if anybody did."

"Wal, nobody'll ever flout at Angie Cousin again, I reckon," said the mother of six, determinately. "I'll always stand up for her, anyway. I only wish she could get up her sperits a little. What red cheeks she used to have, and a lively word for everybody, an' jaunty kind o' ways. I can assure you, Miss Rycker, it very often brings the tears into my eyes to think what a shadder that poor gal is o' what the

Lord meant her to be, if things hadn't turned out jest as they did."

"Does it?" said Miss Briny. "Now it don't me; I suppose it depends on one's pint o' view. You've got a hearty family, an' are used to see folks find their pleasure in frolickin' and noise; but p'raps if you was lonesome-like, an' had a good deal to contend with one way an' another" (and Miss Briny sighed heavily), "there'd be something comfortin' in her grave looks and kind o' sympathizin' way. Not but what I'd like to see her happy, and all that," continued the poor spinster in a parenthesis of disinterestedness; "but as long as there must be so much sorrer and misery in the world, those on us that's seen trouble can't depreciate enough them that knows how to meet 'em on their own ground. Angie's face and figure may, as you say, be shadders of what the Lord meant 'em fur; but they're kind o' softened shadders to my thinkin', like things you see in the moonlight; sorrer and sufferin' have warred against the flesh, but they've made on her a ministerin' spirit, an' that last's a blessin' to humanity, and no disappointment to the Lord, I reckon."

A ministering spirit! That, then, was the calling to which Angie was called! and in its fulfilment, so far as she was faithful, she had already acquired a new popularity. Not that emergencies like those above referred to were frequent, — they came only at wide intervals; but the spirit of her life was nevertheless one of sympathy, and unconsciously made itself felt. Those who have probed life deeply at one point, know better what lies beneath the surface everywhere. Angie had been social by nature, like her father; but experience now had let her down into the heart of things, and what others only knew of, she could feel. So henceforth her look, her voice, the touch of her helping hand were not like the look, the voice, the touch of the uninitiated. God had poured on her the ordaining oil, and henceforth sorrow claimed her as its priest.

It was long before she knew her office, longer still before she gave herself to its fulfilment. The tear of pity was the

first softening dewdrop to her rebel heart; the friendliness which afterwards flowed from the same source in a wider stream, evoked gentle emotions that had seemed crushed and dead; kindness directed their growth and culture, and God's love at last revived the soul, which, buried in the deep grave of all its earthly hopes, had found therein a well of water, and was springing up into everlasting life.

Here then was resurrection, — not of hopes gone and dead; not of happiness, blotted out for ever; not of ease, of which there was no earthly prospect, but of the soul to its higher life.

Even now she cannot always make duty a substitute for joy, patience the cure of pain; or the peace of God a rest for her troubled spirit. There is the struggle, the battle, and often the defeat for her, as for all who fight the fight of faith.

But she has an inheritance among the faithful. Her sunny traits came of the paternal blood; but her mother was of the Puritan stock, — men and women who, with faces sternly set heavenward, weathered sea and storm. She has their strength of holy purpose; she is fighting under the Master's banner, and on the right side; she has taken to herself the whole armour of God. His grace will be sufficient for her; she will win the victory.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Clew at Last.

It was just five years since the night of the ball at Stein's, — eventful years in the fortunes of the American Republic, including the successes and reverses experienced in more than one foreign war, in honourable restoration of peace, and the establishment of national prosperity on a surer foundation than ever before; years of little more than ordinary interest to the people of Stein's Plains, except for the double tragedy which marked the commencement of the period; since when no local incident had occurred of any comparable importance.

The war was discussed in the village grocery, and the tavern at the cross-roads, with that mingling of shrewdness and ignorance, intelligence and bravado, with which public news is usually canvassed in these schools of American oratory; but the actual knowledge this rustic community had of its facts, or their sense of its nearness, was less than is had in this generation in cases of East Indian or Chinese wars. It was not for them the hand-to-hand struggle in which their grandfathers had achieved freedom, or the life-and-death grapple to which their grandchildren have lately sprung in her defence. Fought at a distance, and for the most part on an element to which they were strangers, the chief interest it possessed for them lay in the alternations of pride and mortification with which they hailed "*our* victories," or lamented "*our* defeats." Peace, when it was announced, was the mere insurance of rights of which they had never dreamed of being dispossessed, and so far as concerned their security, both of person and property, the war and the peace alike might as well have been at the antipodes.

These five eventful years in the national history, then, had rolled over the people at Stein's Plains, leaving no other traces than a few more lines of care on weather-beaten faces, a few children sprung to their growth, a few white heads bleached whiter, a few deaf ears (Hannah Rawle's among others) grown deafer, here and there a fresh-sodded mound in the burying-ground, and the same number of familiar forms missing in their homes.

I wonder how many among the two dozen couples who danced five years ago at Stein's are thinking of it to-night. There is no ball this year to remind them of past festivities. The last attempt, two years ago, proved a failure; perhaps because the hard-working hostess, really slaved to death at last, was no longer behind the scenes, moving secret springs; perhaps because Stein, who was really getting old now, had lost his energy and strength of purpose. At all events, the Christmas balls are among the things that *have* been.

The things that *are*, prove too engrossing for most of the

dancers of five years ago, to spend their time and thoughts to-night in looking back upon the past. Some of them were heads of families even then; nearly all have by this time become thrifty husbandmen or busy matrons, and amid the cares, the noise, the cheerful bustle of their homes, youthful memories or sentimental regrets find little scope for indulgence. Who can pause to meditate upon the past when there are cattle to be foddered, fowls to be plucked and made ready for market, barrels of apples and outdoor pumps to be protected from the frost, sausages to be stuffed, pork liver to be fried for the men's supper, bread set to rise, cradles to be rocked, and children to be huddled off to bed? But in those homes where there are no strong-voiced men coming into supper, no children to be sung to sleep, no work to be done after dark, there is stillness and leisure at this hour, and in those hearts, which the things that *are* can never fill, the things that *have been* are now uppermost. Such a home is that cottage on the lonely cross-road where Angie Cousin still lives with the Widows Rawle.

It is a wild night, just such a night as one they all remember well. The wind is whistling around the house, — that malicious wind, that seems longing for mischief always. Now it sways the branches of an old apple-tree, which are well crusted with ice, and sweeping the window-panes with them, creates a temporary hailstorm; then it snatches a loose shingle from the roof, and twirls it round and round in a mad dance on the housetop. A little while ago, when Angie replenished the fire with damp wood, it met the smoke in the chimney, fought a battle with it, and drove it back in a cloud into her face. Twice it has blown the house-door open, compelling her to bar it at last, and revealing triumphantly at the same time the great drifts of snow which it has heaped up against that side of the house, and which it threatens to heap up higher, for the snow is falling still.

Each of the old women has her straight-backed chair drawn to the accustomed side of the fireplace. Hannah, to all appearance very little changed, sits erect as ever, and the

lines of her face are as stern and uncompromising. Perhaps the season of the year and the wildness of the night have conjured up her spectral thought; perhaps not, for Hannah is too matter-of-fact and practical to be much influenced by coincidences or anniversaries. At all events, they can be only dreams of the past which she is indulging, for though her attitude almost put her beyond suspicion, her deep breathing betrays her, and she is indubitably asleep. Margery, more wasted and bent than ever, cowers down in her corner, listens tremblingly to the storm, glances timorously at her sister-in-law during the continuance of the blasts, and at every lull in the tempest suffers her eyes to rest upon Angie (who has drawn a low chair close beside her), with that pleading, trusting look, which dumb animals bestow on their protectors.

It is so instinctive with Angie to take her seat on Margery's side of the fireplace, and on wintry nights like this to draw a little nearer yet to Geordie's mother; she is so accustomed to feel herself the object of that appealing gaze, and has understood it so long and so well, that, there being nothing new in her relations to Margery, and Hannah being asleep, she is as much lost and abstracted from her present surroundings as if quite unobserved and alone.

She has been knitting by the firelight, — the only light they can afford throughout the long winter evenings; but now the stocking lies idly on her lap, her head is resting on her hand, and she is apparently tracing out objects in the red-hot glimmering coals, — not building castles in the air, only musing on the ruins of those demolished five years ago.

And the firelight on which she is gazing so steadily is reflected meanwhile on her face. What does it reveal there?

Ah, "that depends wholly," as Briny Rycker once said, "on your pint of view." Are you looking for the beauty that formerly made her the belle of Stein's Plains? Then you may look in vain. Youth is beautiful, and Angie's first flush of youth is past; health is beautiful, and lately, Angie's frame, though still capable of much endurance, has shown signs of

languor and debility; happiness is beautiful, and Angie is not happy — patient and peaceful, but that is all. Angie's beauty, too, had been pre-eminently of that order which is enhanced by, if not dependent on, good spirits, arch expressions, playful ways. Her features were never regular; there was nothing mechanical in her smile; none of her graces were of the statuesque type. Nature made her one of those jewels which has intrinsic lustre, but needs animation, motion, light, to give it radiance. She was not a pearl which is best set off against a dark background. She was exactly calculated to play a brilliant part in society; she would never make an artist's saint, or a model nun. She is certainly out of her element, and Nature has a right to be disappointed in her, if not Heaven. What a pity!

And this, then, is victory! Certainly; why not? Tell me, is victory beautiful? Is it not wounded, stained, scarred, just in proportion as it is hard won and glorious? Does it not come with tattered banners, and broken ranks, and weary steps, as tokens of its triumphs? Who sees in our decimated batalions, or on the face of our bloody battle-fields, the cheering signs of conquest? It is known by its fruits. It is felt, not seen.

I have shown a few of the ways in which Angie's self-conquest made itself felt in her little sphere; but look at her as she sits in the firelight, and what do you see? "Why," you will say, "only a pale, sober-looking woman." "Pretty?" "No; I should never have dreamed of her being pretty. Neat, to be sure; but, oh, how plain her dress is! How old she is getting, too! Don't I spy a few grey hairs in her head, or is that only my fancy in this pale light? Dear me! can that be Angie? Why, I don't believe I should have known her!"

It is Angie, and the plain livery she wears is the badge by which you may often recognize them that have overcome.

How calm she looks! Whatever visions she sees in the embers now, they have no power to disturb her peace; her face wears a sad expression, but her attitude is full of repose. She is not so calm as she seems, however. This composed

attitude has become habitual with her; and the visions, painful as they may be, are too familiar to startle her with their presence. But her nerves are far from sound; for a stamping of feet outside the door, and a hand laid on the latch, cause her to give a convulsive start, — not because the step and touch are strange, for, though unexpected, she knows them well; but, perhaps, because the coming visitor is painfully associated with the subject of her meditation; possibly because he is unwelcome to her at all times, or perchance merely on account of the sudden turn given to her thoughts. But the shock is for an instant only; then she rises composedly to take down the bar, and admit the visitor.

Margery's childish look follows her to the door. "What's that?" cries Hannah, whose dull ears have echoed just enough sound to cause her to awaken from her nap with a more perceptible start than Angie's. "My brother Dick, I vum!" as Van Hausen came in, powdered with snow. "Wal, if ever there is one night in the year worse than another, it's sure to bring you."

Angie placed a chair in front of the fire for him.

"'Do, Margery? 'do, Hannah?" he muttered, abbreviating the customary salutation of society to the last degree to save words, and, as usual, taking no notice whatever of Angie, who, accustomed to be thus overlooked by him, resumed her low chair with the meekness of one who is content to be despised.

Then there was a considerable silence; but this was nothing strange. Hannah being deaf, and Margery what she was, poor soul! and Angie a creature wholly ignored, Van Hausen's conversation with them usually consisted of a few common-places, uttered at intervals, and the long pauses between were neither felt to be oppressive nor ominous. They were merely characteristic of occasions wherein social intercourse was well understood to be supplementary to the true object of the visit, which usually revealed itself after Dick was gone, in the form of a basket of groceries found on the doorstep, a sparerib of pork left hanging in the shed, or

some such substantial token of the visitor's presence. To-night, Christmas being so near, a fat turkey, or the materials for a plumpudding, might reasonably be anticipated as an after-piece.

But any such anticipation was destined to be disappointed. The object of Van Hausen's present visit was no less weighty, but its delivery must precede, not follow, his departure, and must be made in person.

He was awkward at the undertaking. Though evidently oppressed with the burden which he had brought so far through the storm, his efforts to relieve himself of it were for some time ineffectual. His conversation was more terse and abstracted than usual. His eyes were fixed on a single spot in the rag-carpet, excepting as he now and then turned them suddenly upon Hannah, he seemed about to give utterance to what was uppermost in his mind, then checked himself abruptly. The truth was, he had something of more than ordinary interest to communicate, but dreaded its effect on the old woman. At last, as if all the force gained by his previous efforts had concentrated itself for a final blast, he leaned forward, put his mouth to one of her deaf ears, and bawled out, without preface or preamble, "We've got a clew to the murder!"

"You hain't?" cried Hannah, jumping as if a shot had issued from Van Hausen's mouth and pierced her brain. It was a blasting shot indeed. It had struck two poor hearts on the opposite side of the fireplace, and seemed to let out the life-blood. Margery's hand clutched Angie's gown, as with a death clutch; but these two victims were otherwise still, and attracted no attention.

"We have, though," responded Van Hausen, in a tone of assurance, almost of triumph.

"It's comin' out, then! the Lord be praised! I shall see my old man avenged afore I die! How did it come to light? Was it one or two?" All this Hannah poured out at a breath.

"Dun know yet," shouted Dick, with an emphasis in-

tended to check impatience and allay excitement. "We've got a clew, that's all."

"How? Where? What is't?"

"Wal! it's a man down to York. He's turned State's evidence, I hear. They're a goin' to take his testimony to-morrow, and I'm goin' down there to see about it."

"Can't hear! What does he say?" cried Hannah, with irritation; for Dick, in uttering a phrase of any length, was apt to muffle his voice and lower it a pitch, forgetful of her infirmity. "Come here, Angie, and tell me what he says."

Angie somehow tottered to her feet in obedience to this summons. Her clear voice was often Hannah's ear-trumpet. What an office for her, to act as interpreter now! But there was no escape. Hannah's call was imperative. Margery held her back, however, keeping firm grasp on her gown. Angie dared not remonstrate with the trembling Margery. She was compelled to unwrench the withered hand, hastily and by force. The hand thus unloosed from its stronghold clasped its mate with an expression of despair, while anxious eyes followed Angie as if imploring her not to league herself with the betrayers.

But she must play her part, however hard; must report faithfully to Hannah every word of Van Hausen's, though every word were a thunderbolt. Fortunately for her, the worst there was to tell was told already. It only remained to explain to Hannah, which was accomplished with some difficulty on account of her ignorance of legal forms, that a certain man, who had been some time since committed to prison for crimes of the lesser magnitude, was about to be employed as testimony in the case of one Bullet and his gang, noted pirates, recently captured at sea, and now awaiting trial in New York. The man who proposed to turn State's evidence had confessed himself an accomplice in many crimes, both by sea and land; as he had, among other confessions, dropped a hint to his gaoler of having, five years before, been en-

gaged in some atrocious affair in New Jersey, the gaoler remembering the reward offered for the discovery of Baultie Rawle's murderers, lost no time in communicating with the legal authorities, and also with Van Hausen, who was known to be interested in the ferreting out of the crime and its agents. The expectation of obtaining evidence in the Rawle affair lay in the fact that the witness, whose eagerness for the conviction of Bullet had led him to make revelations of the past, would, when furnishing his testimony in the one case, be induced, either by the promise of indulgences, or for the sake of easing his conscience, to make a clean breast regarding his complicity in other crimes.

To aid in this purpose, it was deemed desirable that those most nearly concerned, and who might, by their questioning or hints, deduce the necessary proofs, should be present at his examination. This had been postponed, for some reason unknown to Van Hausen, to the last possible moment, but the court for the trial of Bullet being already in session, it could be no longer delayed. Van Hausen, who had been made acquainted with these facts by the detective some days previously, had hitherto forbore imparting them to Hannah, in order to save her unnecessary suspense; but as he had been notified to be present the next morning at an examination of the man preparatory to his appearing in open court, he did not venture to withhold from her any longer a secret in which she was the party most interested.

The above information for her benefit was elicited, not in any connected form, but in detached phrases, uttered in successive jerks by Van Hausen, and communicated by Angie as by an echo, — a thing not supposed by its auditors to hear, think, or understand; an unconscious reporter merely. Only Margery wondered at Angie. She, poor creature, with strained eyes and imploring hands, seemed to protest with her against every word of which she suffered herself to be the medium. The very echoes may betray, and with her last bulwark of strength seemingly in league against her, poor Margery felt herself forsaken and lost. But Angie's voice,

like Nature's, was simply obedient to law. What the obedience cost her no one but herself ever knew.

There was something awful in the calmness with which, after the first shock of surprise, Hannah listened to Van Hausen's report and treasured up its details. It was the calmness of triumph, the confidence of victory. As her mind took in and digested one item after another of the intelligence Dick had brought, the feverish irritability she had manifested at first settled into the composure of a resolved will. She drew herself to the edge of her chair like one ready for action, braced up her tall form, clenched her right fist, and looking coming events, as it were, in the face, felt herself more than ever her dead husband's champion. No judge in all the land could be half so stern, so terrible, so pitiless as this old woman, who had waited all these years for vengeance, and not waited, as she now believed, in vain. Margery cowered before her. Angie shuddered as she saw her thus gird herself for the onset.

"Are you goin' to York in the mornin', Dick?" was Hannah's deliberate query, at the conclusion of his report.

He nodded in the affirmative.

"What time?"

"I shall start afore sunrise," was his answer, transmitted through Angie.

"I wanted to know, 'cause I'm goin' with you," said Hannah, coolly.

"You? what fur? where to?" asked Dick, in surprise.

"To the gaol; to the court where the trial is, to see the whole thing with my own eyes. Who's a better right, I'd like to know?"

Dick looked dumb-founded. He would never have confided the matter to Hannah if he had thought of this as the consequence. He expostulated; the severity of the weather, the open pung in which he should be obliged to travel, the unsuitableness of such an expedition for women, the trial to her feelings, everything he could suggest by way of argument was brought forward in opposition: but it was of no use;

Hannah was firm. Go she would, — go before sunrise, in her brother's pung and in spite of the weather, and she closed the catalogue of her plans with the words, "Angie will go with me."

Angie had stooped to pick up a brand from the hearth, which she let fall at this. A look of agony overspread her face, and she cried out, like one in terror, "Not me! — O no!" At the same moment Margery stretched out a hand in a frantic manner, and clutched once more at her gown. Angie, to hide the action, suffered herself to be drawn to Margery's side of the fireplace, and beneath the folds of her dress, patted the withered hand in a soothing, caressing manner, as one pats a child. Margery looked comforted.

But Hannah persisted. "You wouldn't have me go alone, child, among all those men! Besides, I can't hear a word without you. It won't hurt young folks, I guess, if an old woman like me can risk it; though it is bad business we're goin' on, an' winter weather inter the bargain."

Margery quivered like an aspen leaf. Angie, still patting the hand, seemed to say — "There — there! hush — hush! we must meet it as well as we can."

"Wal, Han," screamed Dick, who, paying no attention to the question concerning Angie, taking a rude pleasure perhaps in interrupting it, had risen to go. "You've got to be ready 'fore sunrise, that's all; 'tain't my fault if you ketch yer death," he grunted, as he went out.

There was not much sleep in the cross-road cottage that night. Hannah's eyes were strained wide open; and though she went to bed first, resolved, among other things, to fortify herself with a good night's rest, the visions which haunted her imagination were not of the sedative order, and she lay still, but wakeful, eager, longing for the dawn, to her so full of promise. Margery crept into bed beside her, as the lamb might do which has been taught to lie down by the sleeping lion, but has seen symptoms of its companion's ferocity, and is in dread lest the enemy may wake and pounce upon it. Especially did this nightmare of terror seize upon her when,

through the darkness, she watched the companion of her pillow creep out of bed, steal to the bureau, feel in the corner of the upper drawer, to make sure that the mitten, — George's mitten, that precious bit of proof — was safe, and satisfying herself of the fact, steal back to bed. Could George's mother sleep that night? Her visions were not of the stuff that dreams are made of, though nightmares are sometimes.

Angie would gladly have sat up until morning. She had to make ready for an early breakfast, bring out her own and Hannah's best warm clothes for the journey, and hunt up bricks to heat in the ashes over night, to put into the bottom of the sleigh as a protection against frozen feet. She would have made a pretence of business enough to occupy her until daylight, if it were only to keep near Margery, and now and then, on every trifling pretext, creep into the bedroom and secretly pat the hand that was seeking hers always. But the moment everything absolutely necessary was done, Hannah ordered Angie off to bed, where she lay, quaking, shivering, moaning, — not with the cold, though her window panes were coated with ice, her breath frozen on the sheet, the wind coming in at many a crack, — but because her tears, her prayers, the faith which had supported her through many a strait, — nothing could save her now from a mortal dread of the morrow.

CHAPTER XX.

On the Track of Crime.

THE morning sun at Stein's Plains came up like a great red ball rising from a bed of snow. The storm was past, the wind lulled, but the cold was intense; the earth seemed shrinking and crouching under its snowy coverlet; the doors and windows of the farmhouses were sealed up with strips of white cement; traces of man's ownership, his industry, his prerogative, — all had been obliterated in a night. Winter had taken possession, and no one had yet risen to dispute her claim.

But she was about to be defied. The challenge was already coming down the cross-road; it was heralded by the jingling of bells; it appeared over the crest of a little hill, in the form of a blue pung, drawn by a white horse, and containing three individuals. It seemed as if "the great red eye of heaven" had started up in surprise to stare at this plebeian object, the only moving thing for miles around, and now coming on at a round trot, breaking at every step the chaste uniformity with which Nature had decked herself. It ought to have been Youth on a voyage of discovery, Innocence seeking adventure, Hope elated at the prospect, who were thus out as pioneers, breaking the first track on that pure, untrodden pathway. Could it be that it was Experience, Revenge, and Fear, all on the track of crime?

It was no other than these last, for Van Hausen, Hannah Rawle, and Angie were already on their way to New York.

They travelled in silence. It was cold enough to stiffen their jaws; had they been a pleasure-party they would not have thawed into merriment so early; as it was, they preserved a silence as stern as that of the still December morning which they were so boldly confronting. Hannah, dressed in a scant cloak of black camlet, a fur cape of yellowish sable (that ugly, old-fashioned sable which our grandmothers sported fifty years ago), and a pumpkin hood of huge dimensions, was by her height, her erect posture, and her determined air, the most conspicuous figure in the pung. Probably she felt the cold, the hard seat, the absence of anything to lean against, less than either of her fellow-travellers. Angie, clad in the close-fitting mandarin, and the little pink hood (faded pink it was now), looked like a child beside her Amazonian companion. She shivered perceptibly; her face wore the expression of one who is dragged forward against her will; she had withdrawn instinctively from Hannah's vicinity to the extremity of the plank which constituted the back seat of the pung, and, leaning over the side of the vehicle, watched the runner cut its track in the snow with as

intense a gaze as if they were voyaging on the surface of a frozen sea, in which they might at any moment sink.

Van Hausen had lately got a stoop in the shoulders, which was more than ever perceptible as he sat leaning over the reins in a brooding attitude, his head crowned with a sealskin cap, and sunk as far as the ears within the upright collar of a green-and-black plaid cloak, fastened at the throat with a great steel hook and chain. Once in a while he roused himself, and half turned round to draw up a well-worn buffalo-robe, apparently to save it from dragging in the snow, in reality to tuck it more effectually around the feet of his female passengers. This act, repeated at intervals, and now and then a slapping of the reins, and a "Go 'long!" to his horse, were the only exceptions to his otherwise stoical deportment.

They journeyed for two hours without meeting or passing anyone on the road, though as they advanced there were increasing signs of animation in the farmhouses and barnyards, showing that the population was astir. The snow had been drifted in some places by the last night's wind, but on the whole the roads were practicable, and travelling facilitated rather than impeded by the storm; so that, although they had the disadvantage of being the first to break track, our party made good speed. As they approached the neighbourhood of the city, and gained roads well trodden by the passage of other sleighs, they progressed even more rapidly, and it was not yet nine o'clock when they reached the ferry at Hoboken. The ferry-boats then were not the floating castles which serve the purpose in our day. So small and inconvenient in comparison was that in which our travellers crossed, that it barely furnished accommodation for Van Hausen's pung, and two other clumsy vehicles which crossed on the same trip. A covered passage, unwarmed, and open at both extremities, offered the only protection for foot-passengers. This was better, perhaps, than utter exposure to the blast that swept across the bay; but Hannah did not think it any inducement, as she said, for "bundlin' out an' in agin;" so

she and Angie kept their seats, and got chilled to the last degree short of freezing, while Van Hausen walked up and down in a contracted space, and thrashed his arms across his chest by way of keeping up the circulation.

Arrived at New York, Van Hausen, without consulting his companions, made at once for their destination, the gaol. Their course lay through the chief business thoroughfares of the city, which, though insignificant in comparison with its present size, was a busy, thriving metropolis, more great and imposing no doubt in the eyes of the rustic then, than the New York of the present day is to the dweller of the most remote corner which New Jersey now affords.

Angie shrank from the city crowd, that aggregate of humanity, — the world. The neighbourhood of Stein's Plains constituted the immediate orbit of her life; but there was an outside world beyond that; a wider sphere, a vaster public, destined to ring with the history of a great crime come to light. And this was that world. These faces, upturned in curiosity as she passed, were already questioning the inmates of the blue pung as to their errand hither; these eager ears were awaiting the startling revelations of to-day; these tongues seemed freshly sharpened for the universal hiss. This sea of human faces was a sea just about to be lashed into fury by the tempest; Angie felt herself launched upon it, and shuddered.

Not so with Hannah. She was in sympathy with the coming storm. Law, Justice, the people's voice, — all were on her side; she could ride on the crest of the billow; she had nothing to fear. So she met the stare of the city throng (and they did stare perhaps, as city folks often do at a country equipage) with the confidence of an equal, if not a master-spirit. Destiny was befriending Hannah; so she and the world were on good terms.

But though Hannah's spirit was equal to the present emergency, the flesh quivered under it. If Angie shook with dread, Hannah shook no less with the cold. Young blood can defy the weather, even when the heart is faint; but the current

runs thin and slow in old veins, and courage cannot keep a chill out of aged bones. If Hannah sat upright now, it was partly because she was benumbed. The expression of her face might well be rigid, for her features were stiffened, her lips compressed and blue; her whole frame vibrated with an unconscious shiver; otherwise, she was almost paralyzed. The noises of the street, too, reached her half-deafened ears in an indistinct rattle, which so bewildered her brain, that by the time they reached the prison gates she had ceased to take notice of surrounding objects, and her stare was that of stupefaction. After all, Angie, trembling as she was, had to support the old woman as she tottered from the vehicle and followed Van Hausen through the entrance gate and up the steps leading to an iron-barred door, at which he had already knocked loudly.

The granite surface of the building, the grated window-frames from which icicles hung in pendants, the hollow reverberation of Van Hausen's knock as it went echoing through the stone corridors, all the sights and sounds which serve to make up the grim uniformity of a prison, acted upon Angie's senses with scarcely less of chill and horror than if she were a criminal under sentence for life. This was the spot to which human society banished its lost and degraded members; it was one of the instruments of its retaliation against crime; it was the giant coadjutor of Angie's companions in the business on which they had come; it almost annihilated poor Angie with its voice and frown.

One of the gaoler's assistants opened the door; he was a stranger to Van Hausen, but the old carpenter having bluntly announced the object of his visit, the party were conducted through a stone passage-way, and thence into a little ante-room, a sort of lounging-place for turnkeys and constables, as might be judged from the attitude of an individual of the latter class, who was leaning idly against the solitary window which overlooked the prison-yard. It was a plastered room, bare, unfurnished, and much defaced by tobacco-juice and other defilements. There was no fireplace, and the only seat

which it afforded was a wooden bench, on which Hannah suffered herself to be placed, Angie standing beside her, while Van Hausen unclasped the fastening of his cloak, raised his sealskin cap from his forehead, set his whip up against the wall, and then looked about him.

"That you, Mr. Van Hausen; wal, how are you to-day, old feller?" said the constable who had been stationed at the window, but who, now that Dick had divested himself of his wrappings, came forward and claimed acquaintance — offering his hand, too, in quite a patronizing way.

This man was one of the city detectives employed five years ago for the discovery of Baultie Rawle's murderer, and as near an approach to a police-officer as this or any other municipality could boast fifty years ago. Van Hausen recognized him, and shook hands cordially enough, but scarcely bestowing a look on his old acquaintance. His eye was wandering round the room.

"Pooty cold reception yer give folks here!" was the result of his survey.

The constable laughed heartily at this good joke, as it seemed to him. "People mustn't calkerlate on getting any great comfort or happiness in these quarters," he answered, jocosely.

"Hain't yer got a fire anywhere about here?" persisted Dick, gruffly.

"I'm afraid we hain't. We have to depend on our good spirits to keep us warm here. Won't you have a drop inside? You must be een-a-most friz with your long ride."

"My women-folks is, I reckon," said Dick, looking anxiously in the direction of his fellow-passengers.

"Cold mornin', mum!" said the constable, addressing Hannah doubtless, but eyeing Angie.

Hannah neither noticed nor heard. Angie answered for both, — "Very cold, sir."

"Sorry we hain't got no fire in this place. Howsomever, Tracy there's gone to speak to the boss. He's got a snug corner at t'other end o' the building. I guess we'll get you

warmed up somehow 'fore long. Ah, here's the boss himself!" he exclaimed, as steps were heard approaching. "Get on the right side o' him now, and you'll do. I'll speak a good word for you, mum," — and "mum" this time meant Angie herself. Her troubled face had conciliated this man perhaps, or her modest manner, or some remnant of her beauty not quite overcast by pain. At any rate he went to meet the chief gaoler, and probably made a benevolent suggestion to him, for immediately after bidding Van Hausen, whose visit he had expected, a matter-of-course sort of good morning, the gaoler, who seemed a well-disposed man, though not much accustomed to practise courtesy, and so a little awkward at it, bowed to Hannah with an "Obedient sarvant, marm! Hope I see you well, marm!" This salutation eliciting no reply, except "The old 'ooman's deaf!" from Van Hausen, the gaoler said, "Ah!" and then apparently relieved by the assurance, addressed himself comfortably to Van Hausen.

"You've had a long ride this morning, I hear, sir," he said; "it's a sharp morning. We ought to have a warmer place than this to receive visitors in at this time 'o year — ladies especially; but we haven't — that's a fact. Our inspectors don't seem to see the necessity of it. If I'd only known about the ladies now —"

"Wal," interrupted Dick, "she *would* come, so I fetched her. It's my sister, you see; the old 'ooman is — the widder — Rawle's widder."

"Oh! ah! indeed!" ejaculated the gaoler, turning short round and surveying Hannah with the interest and curiosity which this announcement excited. The constable took a similar survey, so did the assistant-gaoler, Tracy. From an obscure old woman, Hannah was suddenly raised into a notoriety. Not only was she the widow of a man mysteriously murdered, she was a party concerned in the detection of the crime. She was one of themselves. So they instinctively took the measure of her calibre.

"She's naterally had her heart sot for years on siftin' out this 'ere thing," continued Dick, by way of explaining Han-

nah's presence. "She'd like to have a hand in't, I s'pose. She's got a bit of evidence that she holds on to as she does to her life."

"She has, has she?" said the gaoler. "Well, it may come in play. Anyhow, it's no harm for her to be on the spot when we come to take the testimony. I don't know who's a better right. But we must get her thawed out first. Let me see! We've got a fire in the inspector's office, haven't we, Tracy?"

Tracy nodded in assent.

"I'm expecting the district attorney and his clerk there presently on this very business. If your folks wouldn't mind, now," glancing doubtfully at the two women; and here the gaoler hesitated, held a moment's conference aside with Tracy, then added something in a low tone to Van Hausen.

Apparently Van Hausen assured him that his companions wouldn't mind this something, whatever it might be, which the gaoler hinted at, for he immediately replied, "This way, then!" and was starting off, motioning to the visitors to follow him.

"Look here, mister! I've got to go an' see to my hoss," said Van Hausen. "S'pose I leave my folks with you a spell, an' jine 'em in half-an-hour or so? The lawyers won't be here 'fore that time, will they?"

The gaoler looked at his watch. "Quarter-past nine! They won't be here till ten," he soliloquized. "No, you've got time enough," he added, addressing Van Hausen.

"Then I'll be off," concluded Dick, taking up his whip, and proceeding to re-clasp his cloak.

"I'll do the best I can for you, ma'am, if you'll come with me," said the gaoler, accosting Angie, in default of hearing on Hannah's part, just as the constable had done.

Angie signified to Hannah that they were to follow this gentleman. The old woman rose with effort and moving as if on stilts, so numb and stiffened had her limbs become, tottered away, leaning heavily on Angie's shoulder.

"You're all right now, miss," whispered the constable, in

his patronizing way to Angie, as he was bowing them out of the room. Angie thanked him humbly for the assurance, adding that they should be very glad to go where there was a fire. "She's a spunky old woman," he found time to add, as they moved slowly through the doorway, while Van Hausen and the gaoler exchanged a word or two more in the passage outside. "Any relation o' yours?"

Angie shuddered, and shook her head.

"A right spunky old woman. I've a great respect for her. She'll be quite relieved now in her mind, if it all comes out as we expect; won't she?"

"Perhaps she will," replied Angie, hesitatingly, and turning her face away, so as to avoid as much as possible the keen eye of the detective.

"*Of course* she will," responded the man, confidently. "Anyhow, she has my best wishes. Good mornin', miss!" and hurrying to overtake Van Hausen, for whom Tracy was unbarring the front entrance, he accompanied him out of the building, while Hannah and Angie followed the lead of the gaoler in the opposite direction.

They proceeded through several narrow, dark corridors with iron doors, like oven-doors, let into the stone walls at regular intervals, went up one steep staircase and down another, and passed through an iron gate in one of the passages, which the gaoler unlocked for their admittance, and locked behind them. A heavy door of oak, cross-barred with iron, led them at last into the inspector's office, which was their destination. This room was scarcely more habitable than that from which they had come, except for the presence of a clumsy pile of green wood in the fire-place, which had been coaxed into a fitful blaze just in the centre, but was dripping its cold juices on to the hearth in either corner, and was altogether as little suggestive of cheerfulness or comfort as a fire could be. It had not long been kindled, and the air of the apartment was chilly. The windows, situated on that side of the prison which had been exposed to last night's storm, were obscured by the snow which had beaten against

the panes and frozen there. No sun reached this side of the building in the short winter days, and the moderate share of light which the windows usually afforded was now so far excluded by the coating of sleet, that but for the faint glow which the fire imparted, the room would have been wrapped in a murky twilight. The walls were of rough plaster; a plan of the prison was the only thing that relieved their bareness. A plank floor, well sanded; a high desk, and three-legged stool; a shallow box, filled with ashes, beneath the desk, intended and evidently much used as a spittoon; a few rush-bottomed chairs, painted red; and in the darkest corner a wide settle, on which an old rug, a horse blanket, and some articles of coarse clothing, including a greasy hat, seemed to be carelessly huddled together: these things completed the picture of the room into which Hannah Rawle and Angie were ushered by special privilege and favour.

But the fire was attraction enough for these trembling, half-frozen women. The gaoler pushed a chair in front of it for each of them; and while they sat warming themselves, he turned his back and busied himself at the high desk, looking over a pile of papers, selecting some foolscap, probably for the district attorney's use, and hunting up a few quill pens, inky and worn, which, after he had tested them by a few rapid and satisfactory experiments, he stuck upright in a raw turnip, that answered the double purpose of penwiper and penholder.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Strange Compact.

ANGIE was soon warm. The effect of the fire upon Hannah, however, seemed to be that of developing rather than allaying the chill with which her system was charged. The imperceptible shiver which ordinarily attends long-continued exposure to cold became a tremor so violent and universal, that her knees knocked together, her chair shook under her, and

the tapping of her feet on the floor was distinctly audible. She manifested all the symptoms which, to the experienced observer, are prophetic of paralysis, or what the unsophisticated would express, in general terms, as an "ill turn." She probably feared some such result herself, for her lips were agape with agitation, her breath came quick and short, and her eye was turned upon Angie with an expression of alarm. Angie started to her assistance; so did the gaoler. The former loosened the strings of her silk bag, — the indispensable of those days, — and produced a phial containing spirits of camphor, which she uncorked and applied to Hannah's nostrils. The fumes seemed to act as a partial restorative, for the patient gasped and drew a deep breath.

"If I only had some hot water to mix with it, I'd give her a little of this to drink," cried Angie.

"I rather think I can muster some," was the cordial response of the gaoler, who had hitherto stood by, anxious, but inefficient. "I'll see," and he hastened from the room.

It was a considerable distance to the prison kitchen, where the hot-water boilers were, and the gaoler was gone some minutes. By the time he returned, bringing with him a porringer of hot water and a little tin mug, Hannah had partially rallied. A dose of diluted spirits of camphor, which Angie then administered, proved so efficacious, that the tremor soon began to subside, the blue lips of the patient resumed their natural colour, she became composed and breathed easily.

"That'll do — now, let me alone!" she said imperatively to Angie, as soon as she could recover her speech. "I'm well enough. Go an' sit down, child!" she added, with irritation, seeing that Angie, who had been supporting her head, still stood watching her progress towards recovery. "I hate to see folks make a fuss about nothing," muttered Hannah, speaking to herself, but as usual in an audible tone.

Angie obeyed. The gaoler, seeing the girl thus unceremoniously repulsed, and much diverted himself at the old woman's "grit," bit his lips to keep from laughing, and re-

turned to his occupation at the desk. After awhile he gathered up the papers he had been examining and went out, pausing at the door an instant, to inspect the room with a gaoler's eye, and see if all was right, especially the obscure corner where the settle was, which he peered into so scrutinizingly before satisfying himself of the safety of everything, that the action attracted Angie's attention, and after he had gone her eyes unconsciously continued to rest upon the dark pile of rugs and clothing which was heaped up there.

The gaoler's step had hardly ceased to echo through the long stone corridors, when Angie was startled by a low, moaning sound, a sort of suppressed groan, proceeding from the dim corner into which she was gazing. At the same moment there was a perceptible motion in the dark heap on the settle. Angie held her breath and listened; her eyes were strained and intent upon the movement. It almost seemed to her that she must be dreaming, and that the moan of pain and despair, which she heard was an utterance wrung from her own aching heart. Any self-delusion on this subject, however, was but momentary, for almost before she could indulge in a conjecture concerning what had just met her eye and ear, a figure, hitherto stretched out on the settle and asleep, started into a sitting posture with such spasmodic velocity and force, that Angie, as if actuated by an electric shock, sprang to her feet at the same instant.

"Who's that?" cried a voice, in what would have been a shriek, but that feebleness transformed it into a whisper.

Angie, frightened no less by the ghostly voice than by the spectral object which she beheld opposite to her, stood still, and made no reply.

"What do I smell? Give us some on't; come!" cried the sepulchral voice, and at the same time a great gaunt hand clutched eagerly at the air in the direction of Angie. The gesture was so threatening, the dread that this ghostly figure would rise and make a spring at her so overmastered any lesser fear, that Angie crept a little nearer. At the same time she gave a timid glance at Hannah, who, deaf and drowsy-

ing (for the camphor was exercising a soothing influence upon her), saw and heard nothing. Even at this present crisis the fear of Hannah was instinctively uppermost with Angie.

"Hush!" she said, in a persuasive tone, as she approached the fresh object of dread so unexpectedly revealed to her. "Hush! lie still! you'll disturb *her*," pointing towards Hannah.

But the exhortation was needless. Before Angie, creeping cautiously forward, had reached the settle, the figure, exhausted and faint, had fallen back like a dead weight, and lay mute and rigid.

Angie, breathing more freely as the figure before her thus became powerless for harm, stood and gazed upon it. It was a man, or rather the vestige of a man, a mere wreck. There is nothing on earth so ugly as sickness, except sin. The one ravages the body, as the other the soul. Both had done their worst to waste and deform this man. The result was appalling. Add to this the unusual size of his frame, now a skeleton, trying everywhere, as it seemed, to force itself through the skin; the coarse clothes that, too large for his wasted body, were carelessly put on and hung loosely about him; the shirt gaping wide, and in the absence of every species of neckcloth revealing a grisly throat and chest, with sharp protruding breast-bone; the hair and beard of a satyr, and behind them the face of a ghost; an eye so sunken and hollow as to be almost lost, and yet burning with the fire of unquenched violence and lust; and was it strange that Angie's first sensation, when she saw him fall back lifeless, was one of deliverance and relief? that, unable to summon help against this wretch's possible violence, she found her own strength in his weakness? Inevitable as was this first feeling, compassion almost instantly succeeded it. As he lay with his eyes closed, his consciousness gone, his form, just now writhing with excitement and vehemence, reduced to more than infant feebleness, all the woman in Angie was stirred; the wretch of the last moment was the victim of this; her terror was changed to pity; he needed her. Not to help herself, but

him, was now her first impulse, and she applied herself to the task, not without an inward shrinking, but with no less zeal than she had employed a few moments before for Hannah's restoration. But not with such immediate success. For some time her efforts were unavailing. She chafed his temples with the camphorated spirit which he had smelt and craved, applied it to his nose and lips, fanned him with his hat, and exhausted all her little curative arts, but apparently to no purpose. The swoon was utter and obstinate; she could not even perceive that he breathed; and at last she found all her self-command forsaking her in the belief that the blow which had thus felled him in her very sight was nothing less than a death-blow. She had thus reached such a stage of alarm, that to rouse Hannah, run into the passage-way and clamour for aid from some quarter, would have become instinctive and inevitable, when the object of her cares gave a slight gasp, then a feeble breath dilated his nostrils.

"He's coming to!" murmured Angie, with thankfulness. "Poor soul!" she added pitifully, putting one hand beneath his head and raising him a little, while with the other she diligently bathed his forehead with camphor. She was thus occupied, thus murmuring, when he opened his eyes and looked at her.

Now this man was no novice. He had tasted life at many springs, exhausted many; he had worn out the world and himself; he had known far too much. But there was one thing he had never known, — the touch of a virtuous woman's hand — the sound of her voice in pity. Had he wakened out of his swoon to hear some angel voice welcoming him to the abodes of the blest — to feel some angel hand washing away his sins, he could not have been more astonished, more awed. That little remnant of virtue which his soul retained —

— "for neither do the spirits damn'd
Lose all their virtue,"

shone through the mass of corruption which he had otherwise become, and for the first time, throughout a long career of

guilt, the expression of this man's eye had in it nothing terrible.

So Angie kept on with her task, undismayed by the eye fastened full upon her; she even smiled upon her patient with a gentle smile of congratulation and encouragement, at which he only wondered the more.

"Wouldn't you like a little to drink?" she presently asked, seeing how eagerly he began to snuff the medicated spirits, and remembering that this was what he had smelt and being seized with a longing for on first awaking.

He responded by a sort of grunt, expressive of satisfaction at the proposal.

The porringer of hot water was still steaming on the hearth. Angie once more poured from her phial into the tin mug, and diluted the spirits from the porringer; very weak she made the dose this time. She stepped stealthily to the fireplace and back again, so as not to disturb Hannah, who was by this time deep in her nap, sitting bolt upright, as was her practice, we know, at home.

"You feel better now, don't you?" was Angie's next kind inquiry, as the sick man, after drinking gluttonously, handed back the mug to her, at the same time smacking his lips and licking up the drops that clung to his beard.

He answered only by stretching out his hand, and feeling of hers, reverently, as if to test whether her touch was really anything human.

"Poor hand! how thin it is!" said Angie, trying not to shrink from the bony fingers with their great outgrown joints. "Let me bathe it," she added, partly out of compassion, — still more, perhaps, as a *ruse* to escape the repulsive ordeal of his touch; and stretching the hand on the rug which served for a coverlet, she moistened a handkerchief already devoted to the cause, and bathed the dry skeleton thing sedulously for a moment or two.

It pleased, and no doubt refreshed him. Childlike (for he had been a child once, and childhood came back to him

strangely at this moment), he soon stretched out the other hand in a pleading fashion.

Angie understood; said, "Yes, indeed!" and cheerfully accepted this new claimant for attention. She had scarcely made a pass across it with the handkerchief, however, when she stopped short — something had happened to her — she could not proceed. It was not that this man had sometime met with an injury; that one of his joints was bent, so as to be at right angles with the rest of the finger, and that the nail was shapeless; it was not even that it was the left hand, and the third finger, that had suffered thus, — this sort of accident might have occurred to anybody. No, it was not that *alone*; but as the finding of the first link in a lost chain is the finding of all the rest, so Angie seeing this, saw more. Let one whom we have not beheld for years, and whom time and many changes has transformed, come upon us suddenly, and he is a stranger; let us show him one familiar look, recall one association connected with him in the past, and the recognition is instant and complete. A moment more, and we wonder we ever could have mistaken his identity. So with Angie; to recognize this token was to pause, to question herself, to be convinced: and all in one second of time. Almost before she could drop the hand and scan the face, she knew what misery, disease, and decay had only veiled. Light now had come in like a flash and revealed to her — Nicholas Bly.

She had half-expected to see this very man before the day was over. She had looked to find him in the criminal prepared to testify; she had imagined how, when the lawyers came, this well-remembered villain would come too, — a great, bloated, swaggering, swearing villain; but to find him thus, was a discovery as startling as if she had encountered what he, indeed, looked to be — his own ghost; and more to be dreaded, for real ghosts are phantoms — this seeming ghost was real.

And what a task was that which she had set herself! no mortal task — the washing of those hands! Could she continue it? At first her whole soul revolted at the thought;

then came a reaction. Were not hands that she had clasped in love, that her secret heart clasped still, as blood-stained in their grave, perhaps? What right had *she* to shun a murderer's hand? And, the struggle past, she bathed on more assiduously than before, not without wondering, with a cold shudder as she strove to cleanse those accursed hands, if it was blood that had shrunk and withered them so.

The shock had been so momentary, the hesitation whether to resume her task or retreat dismayed had been so well mastered, that it did not occur to her she had done anything to attract attention or excite alarm. But there must have been something on her part, either in action or look, that was abrupt and significant. The magnetism with which she had hitherto charmed her patient into repose was broken; the acute sensibilities of disease were irritated. Without giving her a chance to regain the monotonous motion which had proved so soothing, this fevered man (no longer a trusting child — she had startled and banished the child) snatched his hands from her, raised himself on his couch in the same vehement manner as on his first awakening, and cried out in that husky whisper which gave a mysterious horror to his slightest word, "Who are yer? I say, what are yer here fur?"

Involuntarily Angie retreated a step; upon which the man, naturally brutal and seeing her courage yield, tried to grasp her arm, and would have become fierce and clamorous in his speech, but there was no tenacity to his limp muscles, and his words resolved themselves into a gurgle. His hand fell as if paralyzed, and he could only question her with his eyes.

Seeing this, Angie resumed her sway. "Be quiet," she said, in a tone none the less commanding that it was very low. "I will tell you nothing until you lie down and are quiet. There!" as he fell back, exhausted and obedient, "that is right. Now think a moment, and you will know who I am; you have seen me before."

A wild, incredulous stare now fastened itself upon her. Though inwardly trembling under his gaze, she suffered it

awhile; then having assured herself that he was completely subdued, and perceiving that the racking of his memory was costing him fruitless efforts, she said, in the low, firm tone which evidently impressed him powerfully, "I know you, Nicholas Bly, and you will know me when I tell you who I am, and how I came here. Have you forgotten Angie Cousin, daughter of the old Frenchman at Stein's Plains?"

He would have started up in surprise at this, but she held him down; it did not require much strength.

"I know I am changed," said she. "Misery changes us all; but you saw me the night of the Christmas ball. You must have seen me before, I think, for your face was familiar to me then, though I did not know your name until afterwards."

While she spoke he was scanning her features, a process which, beginning in doubt, ended in conviction; the latter asserting itself the moment she paused, in the words, whispered hoarsely, as if to himself, "It's the very gal!" and confirmed by an oath, which would have been horrible in the mouth of a man in full strength, and which seemed as if it must blast the feeble lips that gave it utterance.

"Don't swear!" cried Angie, imploringly. "Don't speak such a word as that again."

He grinned in a ghastly fashion, but was awed, nevertheless, by a request so strange; and, what would have seemed miraculous to any old comrade of his, he gave vent to his blasphemy but once again during his further dialogue with her.

"What do you know about me?" he asked, abruptly, after a moment, and looked anxiously at her, awaiting her answer.

"All."

"All!" he exclaimed, in a suppressed howl. "What, not about —?" and he stopped short.

"About old Baultie Rawle? Yes; you can hardly tell me anything about that which I do not know already."

"Who else knows?" he gasped forth, his eyes rolling wildly.

"Nobody."

"Nobody else?"

"Not another soul."

"You never told?"

"Never."

"You're a —" he was about to preface his noun of compliment by a string of most profane adjectives, but her look checked him at the first syllable — "You're a — a — angel" he brought out with difficulty, and an apparent consciousness that the word was a tame one to express his appreciation of her.

"How could I tell and betray you both!" was her impulsive ejaculation.

"'Twas the young man you was partial to, then — not Nick Bly? Oh, I see! I understand!" Nick spoke with more distinctness now. Excitement had partially restored his voice.

"I loved him," said Angie. "I — I — *pity you*; but you were a stranger, and I *loved him* dearly."

"Loved him right straight through?"

"Yes."

"Love him now, by ———." He barely restrained himself this time from an oath in confirmation of the truth which her heaving breast and trembling lips revealed.

"I do."

"Wal," again with difficulty suppressing a blasphemy, "ain't you a buster for lovin'?"

Angie was silent; this was a question that required no other answer than her sobs.

"He wan't wuth it!" soliloquized Nick, looking at her with mingled admiration and pity, both ennobling sentiments, almost unknown before in this bad man's breast.

Angie made haste to control herself. Pride came to her aid. She must not lose her self-control in such a presence. It would be too degrading.

"Anyhow," continued Nick, who had spent the time she occupied in rallying, in mental calculation, and who addressed her the moment she looked up, "you saved my neck from swingin' fur nigh on ter half-a-dozen year. I thank yer fur that; it don't matter to me how it come about, so's I was the gainer. You may blow now fur's I care. It's all one to me. I'm bound to blow myself, whether or no, and give the devil his due. He's got his grip on *me* already. I'd like to tickle him with some other game;" and Nick's words ended in a smothered roar — one of those yells of bodily anguish which tell of giant strength transformed to giant pain.

Angie waited until the groan was past, and until he had ceased to writhe under the paroxysm.

"*I* give that young man's name up to infamy, Nicholas Bly!" she then vehemently exclaimed — "no, never, — nor *you* either; whatever else you tell, you *must* not, you *shall* not, betray *him*!"

"Why not?" was the defiant retort, spurted at her from between teeth clenched with agony.

She took advantage of the acknowledgment he had just made. She had no real claim on that score, but she was desperate.

"I have kept *your* secret all these years," she said, in a tone of appeal; "now you must keep mine."

He parted his teeth only to grin scornfully at her. "'Twas your'n all along," was his keen answer when at length he spoke.

"I know it; I know it," she replied, as vehement in her candour as in her expostulation. "It was for *his* sake; I own that, — but I spared *you* as well. Oh, keep it now, for *mercy's* sake, and spare *me*!"

"What would *I* get by keepin' dark, I'd like to know?" was the rejoinder of one in whom a brutish greed was instinctively uppermost.

"You will get nothing by betraying him," responded Angie, confidently.

"Shan't I?" he exclaimed. "You needn't tell me that!

You think, I s'pose, that nothin' in this world can do any good to a poor rascal that's got the death grip on him, and is bound to kick the bucket 'fore many days. But if I had only one breath left, gal, I'd give it to see him with a rope round his neck, I would."

"Oh, how can you be so cruel?" she cried, raising both hands before her face to shut out the malignant expression which frowned on her like a gathering tempest.

"Cruel!" he vociferated, in husky tones, the gnashing of his wolfish teeth making up in fierceness what his voice lacked in strength. "Look here!" and he snatched her hands before she could repel him, and with a force for which she was unprepared, and holding them a moment, compelled her to face the torrent of rage which her words had excited. "Cruel, you call it, do yer? you fool! What do you know 'bout cruelty? I'll tell yer what's cruel, I will. It's fur me to do the dirty work an' starve, an' fur him to live idle an' lick up the cream. It's fur me to skulk about in rags an' have the dogs o' the law at my heels, an' fur him to wear fine clothes an' play the gen'l'man! It's fur him to be strong, an' rich, an' free, an' fur me to rot in a jail! An' which on us is the wust? He had eddication, an' friends, an' chances in life; and I—I was a poor toad, that was born an' brought up in the mud. I was bad enough 'fore he crossed my path, but since then I've been the devil's own cub. His time's come though at last! Blow on him, gal? Yes, I will, and blast him! He carries matters with a high hand now, I warrant; but I'll soon see yer laid low as I am, yer—" and giving licence now to his blasphemous tongue, he apostrophized his former accomplice in a volley of epithets so imprecatory, that the walls of the room seemed to shudder, and Hannah partially awoke, and muttered like one disturbed by uneasy dreams. At the same time Angie released herself, by a sudden effort, from a grasp which she felt to be more than ever contagious of evil.

"What yer 'fraid of? I won't hurt *you*," expostulated Nick.

"You *have* hurt me! You *mean* to hurt me!" she cried, in the tone of one suffering torture already. "Yes, me, and his old mother, nobody else — you cannot hurt the poor fellow you have cursed."

"What do yer mean by that?" he retorted, at once incredulous and alarmed.

"He is laid low already; as low as you could wish."

"How? Where?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Nick, with a sort of smothered roar, like that of a wild beast disappointed of its prey.

The unearthly sound completed the awakening of Hannah, whose short, final snore gave indication of an abrupt restoration to consciousness.

"Are yer sure?" questioned Nick, the eagerness of his doubt relieving for a moment the blank expression of defeat and chagrin which had overspread his face.

"Angie, where are you? Who's that?" queried Hannah at the same instant, edging round in her chair as she spoke, and gazing into the dark corner, darker than ever now, for the fire had ceased blazing altogether, and the smoking embers occasionally sent a whiff into the room and thickened the atmosphere.

"Sure as I am of my own life," was Angie's low, solemn, answer to the first question. "I'm here, ma'am! It's only a sick man," was her response to Hannah, uttered in a louder key.

"Who are you speaking to? Who's settin' there?" demanded Bly, looking round with agitation; for he now realized for the first time that a third party was present in the room.

"The old woman I came with," said Angie, in a soothing tone; "only the old woman."

"A what, did you say? Come close, I can't hear!" burst petulantly from Hannah, meanwhile.

"Wait — tell me one thing fust! Was it suicide?" gasped

Bly, in a whisper; and catching Angie by the shoulder, he forcibly detained her.

"One of the prisoners! He's sick!" she shouted, by way of appeasing Hannah; at the same time that she answered Bly by an affirmative gesture.

"I thought so! Jest like him! The mean dog, he's even cheated the gallers!" soliloquized Bly, still holding Angie fast, as if she were a hostage.

"A sick prisoner! patience alive! What business has he here? Let him alone, don't you hear me? It may be ketchin'!" cried Hannah, imperatively.

"There, let me go! Mrs. Rawle is calling me; she will be angry," pleaded Angie, struggling to release herself.

Mrs. Rawle *was* angry. She was already starting up out of her chair.

"Rawle?" echoed Nick, in sudden alarm. "Not —" and his voice trembled, and sank to the feeblest whisper, "not — *his* old 'ooman — the widder?"

She was approaching at a sort of spring-halt. Angie, standing just between her and the bedside, again nodded in the affirmative.

"Keep her off! keep her off!" shrieked Nick, in the tone and accent of one frenzied with fear. "I know her. She's a tiger! a wild-cat! She'll tear my eyes out!" and drawing up his knees, by way of a barricade for the rest of his person, he shrank back and crouched in the farthest corner of the settle.

"She shan't hurt you!" was Angie's prompt assurance to Bly; at the same time interposing between him and Hannah, she thrust her back with the words, "Don't come too near; he's afraid of you!"

"What's he 'fraid on?" cried Hannah, sharply; then bestowing a keen look on him, "Why he's mad!"

He looked the maniac, certainly, as drawn up into a heap he glanced at her, and with hands outspread like claws, at once anticipated and shrank from a conflict.

"He's feverish and excited," cried Angie, putting her mouth to Hannah's ear. "You startled him; he didn't know you were here. If you'll go back and sit down I can quiet him."

But Hannah, always courageous, and stimulated now by curiosity, only answered with, "Bosh, child!" and she made a movement to push past Angie, and obtain a nearer survey of the strange object curled up in the corner.

"Keep her off! — keep her off!" reiterated Bly, with frantic gestures; for her resistance to Angie confirmed him in the notion that she was approaching with threatening intent.

Again Angie assured him of his safety, but the poor wretch, helpless and conscience-stricken, was palpitating in every limb, so terrible was his dread of Hannah's vengeance. He seemed to have an instinctive conception of her character.

"She knows me," he gurgled out, as if he read his death-warrant in the old woman's eyes. "She's heard what we've said. You've betrayed me to her!" and he shook his fist furiously at Angie, who had, as he believed, suffered Hannah to remain in ambush, and so master his secret. "She's a tiger! — she'll suck my blood!" He gasped, and tried to give utterance to one last shriek of despair, but it died into silence; his arms dropped, his head sank with a jerk upon his breast, and his whole form collapsed. Fear had struck to the very seat of life, and once more he had fallen into a swoon.

"There!" cried Angie, in that tone which is a plain rebuke.

Hannah heard and understood it. She involuntary retreated a little. Angie supplanted her at the head of the couch, and had recourse to the camphor-bottle.

"What's the matter on him — is he dead? or is it only a trick?" asked Hannah, a little anxiously.

"He's been just so once before," replied Angie, speak-

ing loudly. "I can bring him to, if you'll go and sit down."

Hannah, conscious that her presence was injurious, and might be fatal to the man, who was evidently in a most feeble condition, hobbled back to her chair, muttering, "I'll venture to say it's only a trick; he's as mad as a March hare. You may have him to yerself, an' welcome!" Her ears had not caught the burden of his expressions of alarm. His husky language was unintelligible to her, else her suspicions would have been aroused concerning him. As it was, she only realized that she was somehow repulsive to the man, and she felt that sort of ill-humour against him which invalids and children naturally excite when they manifest arbitrary dislikes.

So she sat down with her back obstinately turned on the offenders (she felt proportionately provoked with Angie, of course). This was well. Angie improved her opportunity, and soon succeeded in first restoring, then calming her patient. He looked around wildly when he first opened his eyes, as one does on awaking from a horrible dream. She made haste to soothe him with the words, "She's gone — gone back to her chair by the fire." He looked over his shoulder timorously. Angie continued, in a soft, comforting tone, "She's deaf — she has not heard a word; she does not suspect who you are. You are safe with me; I won't tell her."

Each of these little phrases was a drop of balm to the irritated nervous system, ready to quake at every fresh fear. Bly looked up at her gratefully — confidingly. As she finished speaking he sought her hand, as children seek a hand when their feet totter in some perilous place. She granted him this pledge of protection, and knew, as she did so, that her power over him — virtue's power over vice — was culminating.

"She came from Stein's Plains to-day," said Angie, pointing towards Hannah, "to hear your confession. She

was in hopes to learn who was guilty of —" here Angie faltered.

"The murder?" continued Nick. He did not shrink from the word as much as she did.

"Yes, — but you will not tell *now*," continued Angie, with energy. "At least you will not betray *him*. Confess to God and to man what you have done yourself, that is right; but oh, do not drag his name before everybody; do not have him hooted at in his grave, poor fellow! There can be no need of that."

He was studying her face with a strange, searching look. He had withdrawn his hand the moment she began thus to plead. The subject estranged him from her, but his features did not now wear a vindictive expression. He was attentive to her words, and she went on.

"If he were alive and rich and respected, as you were thinking, then it would be different," she argued. "Then you might compare your lot with his, and think yours crueller and harder. But to betray his share in the crime would do no harm to him now, for he is dead; it would do you no good, for—" she could not add, "for you are dying," though that was her thought.

Perhaps he read her thought; perhaps he only expressed his own; at any rate he rounded the assertion for her with a groan, and the words, "There ain't enough o' me left to ballast a rope's-end — that's a fact."

"I can tell you what will do you good!" she exclaimed.

"What?" asked the now humbled and submissive man, speaking in the plaintive accents of a sick child.

"Pity — forgiveness — mercy!" she continued, in an outburst of hope and fervour, for she saw how she had subdued him once more to almost infantile docility, and she caught at the chance thus afforded her. "I can't measure your sin or his, or how far each dragged the other down. God knows! But whatever you have against him it will ease your soul to forget it now, and let his memory rest in peace. Oh, think how soon you may come yourself to judgment; think

how many sins you have got to answer for there! They will not seem so black, I know they will not, if you can say, 'I spared a man that was dead, and pitied an old woman who had not long to live, and heard the prayer of a girl whose heart was broken.'"

The sound of a footstep just at the threshold of the door startled her in the midst of her supplication. Instinctively, like one tampering with crime, and fearing to be caught in the act, she darted away from the vicinity of Bly, and with her face to the opposite wall, fixed her eyes vacantly on the plan of the prison which hung there. Bly, too old a counterfeiter to need any further hint, drew up the rug which served him for a coverlet, and pretended to be asleep. The next instant Tracy, the assistant-gaoler, opened the door and looked in. He cast his eye all round the room. Hannah sat staring straight into the fire; Angie was studying prison architecture; Bly still lay, a motionless heap, upon the settle. Tracy was satisfied with his inspection. It was all right, and he went out to receive and usher in other guests, perhaps; most likely the lawyer and his clerk, for footsteps and voices could be heard at some distance down a long corridor, and one of the city clocks had just struck ten.

"Hark! they are coming," cried Angie, as the door closed upon Tracy; and turning, she sprang again to the sick man's side.

"Who? What?" he timidly whispered, lifting his head, staring wildly around, and striving once more in a childish fashion to link his hand to hers for protection.

"The people — the lawyers — the gaoler! They are coming to hear what you have to tell. Oh, don't tell about *him* — don't!" and flinging herself on her knees, and wringing her hands convulsively, she would have poured forth further entreaties, but her voice failed her, and they were all merged in one explosive sob, in which the pent-up agony of years seemed to vent itself.

The soul of Nicholas Bly had long been steeped in sin, and buried beneath a heap of corruptions. But sunk and im-

bruted as it was, there was one power never before tried upon it — the power of a holy love; and that sob of Angie's reached it, even in its grave. The spark thus kindled revealed itself in a softer light, which gleamed from his eye and rested on her with something like compassion.

Startled by the sound of that involuntary sob of hers, Angie had turned her ear with a spasmodic start in the direction of the approaching footsteps, one eye meanwhile scanning the figure of Hannah, who fortunately continued obstinately unobservant. As her glance returned once more to the object of her supplications, she read her advantage in his pitying look; and forgetting everything now but the chance of effecting her purpose, and binding him to secrecy, she snatched both his rough hands in hers and pressed them fervently; then laying one of her own little palms on his clammy forehead, she exclaimed, in an ecstasy of gratitude, "God bless you! — God bless you!"

The action was premature, perhaps, but it sealed her victory.

This man knew nothing of God, had no faith in Heaven, — no hope of the Divine blessing; but this woman's look, her touch, her benediction, had fallen on him like refreshing dew, and given him a strange sense of reverence, trust, and joy. For the first time in his life this abject man looked up, — this doubting man believed, — this blasphemous man was blessed. Promises, warnings, threats, would but have hardened him the more. In the overflowing of a grateful heart, the tide of human love had welled up and reached his parched soul; the blessing was his already; he could afford to pay the price.

So without a word being spoken to that effect, a contract was sealed between them. There was no time indeed for words; a hand was already on the door-lock. Angie had barely an opportunity to glide into her chair opposite Hannah, Bly to resume his sleeping attitude; but as she retreated, with a finger on her lip, there was a solemn query in her gesture which was responded to by an emphatic

dropping of the eyelids on the part of Bly that seemed to promise a secrecy as eternal at the night.

Then ensued a change of scene. The gaoler came bustling in accompanied by a lawyer and his clerk; Tracy and Van Hausen followed, the latter giving emphasis to his entrance by striking the floor with his wooden whip-handle at every step, and the constable previously referred to brought up the rear, dangling a pair of iron handcuffs, and displaying a professional indifference to their use by an attempt to wring music from their metal.

CHAPTER XXII.

Overwhelmed with Success.

PROBABLY the gaoler had mentioned already to the attorney that beside Van Hausen there were a couple of women interested in the prisoner's confession, and anxious to be present at the examination, for he did not seem to be in the least surprised or disturbed at their presence, but proceeded at once to business.

"Well, gaoler," said he, — his keen eye which had shot rapidly round the room, fixed professionally on Bly, who was its sole object and mark, — "how's my man this morning? Ready and hearty, I hope, for we've no time to lose now, you know."

Neither the look nor the question, though both were sharp and equally aimed at Bly, served to rouse him in the least. The gaoler stepped forward, as he said, "to stir him up a little." The lawyer dragged a chair near to the settle, sat down, took his green bag from the clerk's hand, and depositing it between his feet, searched among his red-taped documents for the necessary memoranda.

"What d'yer want? Let me 'lone!" was Bly's gruff, though feeble remonstrance to the gaoler's peremptory shake of his shoulder.

"Come, sit up man! you're able. Here's his honour the

attorney waiting to hear what you've got to say. So be spry, now."

A sluggish jerk and a partial unclosing of the eyes were all the reply elicited by this second effort.

The gaoler growled, muttered an oath, and tried force, but obstinacy made Nick a dead weight.

Here the lawyer, who, having found his papers in the case of Government *versus* Bullet and others, was ready to proceed to action, interfered with "Stand back, gaoler! let him alone, as he says. Bly and I understand each other," — and on the strength of this mutual understanding the man of law, who prided himself on knowing how to manage a witness, drew his chair up to the settle as confidently as a family physician approaches his patient.

"It rests on you and me pretty much to get these rascals hung, Bly. You're ready to do your part, — I see that in your eye."

If ever there was an eye that was a hopeless negative to the lawyer's assertion, it was Bly's at that minute. It looked nothing but dogged indifference and scorn.

"I mean to do my best," continued the wily lawyer; "but after all, you'll be the great man of the day, Bly; and a great day it will be if it sees those sea-sharks convicted. Now, Bly, let us know exactly what I may expect from you."

"Expect from me!" cried the prisoner, raising himself on his elbow with the same suddenness and velocity which had startled Angie, and which, together with the roar of his sepulchral voice, caused the lawyer to reel back in his chair — "Nothing — not a d—d word. I've made up my mind not to blab;" and with a terrible oath he shook his skeleton fist in the face of his interrogator, consigned himself to everlasting perdition if he broke one iota of this, his final vow, and then, suffering his form to collapse, he fell back into the same rigid posture which he had previously maintained.

The attorney, dismayed and chagrined at this unexpected action on the part of one of his most important witnesses, tried to turn it off as a jest. "Pho! pho! nonsense, man!"

he exclaimed, feigning an assurance which he was far from feeling. "You won't desert us so at the last minute, I know. Why, I'm depending on you to identify these rascals, describe their vessel, and testify to the black work that proved what coloured flag she sailed under. That story of the Salem brig will be our great card in this part of the evidence. That'll tell immensely with the crowd and the jury. Give me a little idea now of what I may depend on you to testify," and he glanced at his memoranda. "Eh? come!" encouragingly; then, in a tone of irritation, "Speak man, what's the matter? Don't you hear me?"

The lawyer, a keen observer and physiognomist, was beginning to realize the futility of his words. Bly evidently turned a deaf ear to his question. It was doubtful if he had listened to a syllable of this latter exhortation. His bleared and glazed eyes were fastened obstinately on the plastered wall opposite; his thin lips were strained together; his fists clenched, not in passion, — every trace of that had vanished, giving place to a rigidity of muscle, nerve, and will; a species of moral as well as physical catalepsy, against which there was no appeal.

The lawyer was in a quandary. "Look here, my friend" (with a sarcastic emphasis on the word *friend*), "what does this mean?" was the threatening inquiry with which he turned upon the gaoler. "The case for the Government is quashed, for aught I know, if this man can't be persuaded to testify. He was ready enough with his evidence a week ago. I've put off preparing him to appear in court until the last minute, by your advice, and now — well, if he can't be made to speak, those rascals may get clear yet."

The gaoler, himself greatly disconcerted, now stepped forward to the lawyer's assistance (for he had withdrawn, as became him, in favour of the learned counsel, and had stood leaning against the high desk). The two held a conference, *sotto voce*, the only distinguishable phrases of which were, "Too far gone? Been so before? What do you make of it?" And the replies, "Can't say, sir; don't think so." And,

in a more emphatic tone, "Obstinacy, sir; obstinacy. I'll stake my life on't; just like the rogue."

Doubtless the attorney adopted the gaoler's version of the case; for he returned to the charge with fresh energy. The gaoler stood by, and now and then added to the persuasive efforts of his superior, remonstrances more in his own line. But arguments, promises, and threats on the one part; pushes, nudges, and shoves on the other, effected nothing — absolutely nothing. The subject of them was fixed as a corpse; for any hope of their moving him, body or soul, from his resolution, he might as well have been dead. At last they turned from him in despair and disgust, as they would have turned from carrion.

Then the lawyer was angry. He jerked back his chair, scraping it hard across the sanded floor, and knitting his brows, muttered something about treachery, and a suspicion that his witness had been tampered with.

But he did not suspect anybody there present. No, indeed; why should he? Were they not all either servants of the law, or parties eagerly interested in this man's confession? As he looked at his watch to count his wasted time, and folded up the memoranda of important items suddenly struck from his mass of evidence, he set his teeth and shook his head at some imaginary individual, — the opposite counsel perhaps, — and seemed to hint that at his earliest leisure this matter should be sifted, and the treason brought to light.

Meanwhile she, the guilty one, the pale-faced thing — a mere speaking-trumpet to the old woman — a creature above suspicion, or beneath it rather — what of her? Leagued as she was with treachery, darkness, and guilt, why did not the very prison walls fall upon and crush her? She herself wondered why. Her own success overawed and terrified her. So stupendous was it as to partake of the nature of a failure. Evidently this poor wreck of humanity, with whom she had been tampering, had lost his power to discriminate. Despair

and ignorance rush into extremes. For him it must be either the sunlight of a clean breast or utter darkness and oblivion of the past, and unconsciously she had pledged him to the latter alternative. She had striven merely to save a dead man's reputation, and had thereby defeated the ends of justice, set herself in opposition to government and the law, protected a nest of villains, allied herself to robbery, piracy, and every form of vice. Was it her wickedness or her fate that for ever condemned her to be thus allied? Both she believed, and believing, shuddered.

Benumbed and bewildered by what she had done, petrified like one in a nightmare of dread, she could not have moved or spoken if she would. It is doubtful whether she would have if she could, for her sense of triumph was greater, after all, than her terror; she had courted silence and secrecy as God's best gifts for years — they were hers to excess now, but they were hers; how could she sacrifice them? However, you and I need not discuss the merits of the case, for she did not; she had little responsibility in the matter; she had a vague sense of having by mistake sold herself to the Prince of Darkness; but if so, the crisis was past, he held her fast, body and soul, for that moment at least, and the next the opportunity was gone. Before she could shake off the spell that bound her, the lawyer and his clerk had hurried away, the constable had laid down the handcuffs (it was not just here or now that he had occasion for their use), and was concerting with the gaoler as to the disposition to be made of Bly. Van Hausen, in a gritty, dogged humour, was moving towards the door, and with his whip-handle was gesticulating to the women to follow him. Angie neither noticed nor obeyed, but her abstraction was covered by the more marked obduracy of Hannah, who, puzzled and indignant at a series of proceedings which she had not been able in the least to comprehend, positively refused to budge, jerking herself free from Van Hausen (who, finding his gestures unavailing, had proceeded to give a more emphatic hint by twitching at her cloak), and avowing her intention of remaining until they

were ready to take the evidence, if it were until to-morrow morning.

"But there ain't no evidence to take, I tell yer, woman," bellowed Van Hausen. "He won't testify; so there's an end on't."

"He! who?"

Dick pointed significantly at Bly, who was now passively submitting to be led off.

"What! that varmint!" exclaimed Hannah, in a high cracked key, rendered more than ever shrill by her rising rage. "Now, don't tell me we've come all this way to see what we could rake out o' that heap o' rubbish!"

Dick intimated by a nod that such was the fact, at the same time urging her towards the door, partly by force, partly by assailing her ear with, "Come along, don't you see we're in the way? — they don't want to be bothered with us."

Dick was essentially a modest man, fearful above all things of being an intruder; and it was easy to see, now that Bly was quietly submitting to the process of removal to his cell, that the gaoler only awaited the departure of Van Hausen and his companions, to shut up the private-room and be off too. He was already locking up his desk and quenching the embers on the hearth with the water that remained in the dipper.

Hannah, as sharp-sighted as she was deaf, finally took these hints as a dismissal, and hobbled towards the door, muttering audibly, "I do vum! if men ain't fools — the idee of expectin' to get anything reasonable out o' them leavin's of a man. Why, he's all but dead, and as crazy as a coot inter the bargain. The idee on't! Why, yer must be about as cracked in yer wits as he is, all on yer!"

Angie followed mechanically. They went out by the door at which they had entered. At the same instant Bly, supported by Tracy and the constable, was carried off in the opposite direction. Angie had a consciousness amounting to certainty, — that consciousness which comes by faith, not

by sight, — that Bly was looking back in the hope to win a glance — a grateful glance, perhaps — from her. But she dared not meet his eye; she felt she should betray herself. So, with a fixed gaze and a self-reproachful heart for this too, she turned her back upon the poor wretch, who, faithful but unthanked even by a look, was carried to his cell, while she, free and uncondemned, but scarcely less a culprit in her own estimation, went her way unchallenged.

Whither? Ah, that was the question! Van Hausen, disappointed of the object for which they had come, and with two women on his hands, was sadly at a loss. He could dispose of himself and his own time in a dozen ways, until his horse was sufficiently refreshed for the return drive to Stein's Plains. But the women folks! What should he do with them?

This problem was rendered more difficult of solution from Hannah's vituperative state of mind, and the vacant, terrified expression of Angie's face. Dick had ordinarily more confidence in Angie's ability and discretion than his manner to to her implied; but now, as he said to himself, she looked and behaved like a cat in a strange garret, and she and the old woman seemed equally unfitted to take care of themselves or each other.

Hannah, who had stopped short in the stone corridor between the rows of cells, was still shaking her head and her forefinger in attestation of her plainly-expressed opinion regarding the folly of all who had lured her hither "on such a fool's errand;" Van Hausen, considerably in advance, and impatiently lingering until she and Angie should come up, was apparently taking counsel of his whip-handle, the end of which he rubbed slowly up and down his chin, when the constable, returning from doing escort duty to Bly, came back through the gaoler's room, and overtook our party in the long passage-way. He had resumed his string of handcuffs, and walked briskly, humming a tune and keeping time with his uncouth cymbals. Altogether his presence imparted life and spirit to the grim old prison corridor; and there was some-

thing very cordial as well as patronizing in the way with which he broke off in his tune to say to Angie as he passed, "Sorry for the old woman's disappointment, miss, and yourn; that 'ere testimony turned out a plaguy sham — that's a fact. Now we're goin' to work in earnest," he continued, as passing the women he came with up Van Hausen, and dangled the handcuffs with professional pride. "Them bracelets are the thing for dandy customers, such as I've got to deal with now; bran new they are, the beauties!" and the constable selected one for inspection. "They're a pretty set o' hands that these were made for! — a desperate gang, sir, now I tell yer."

Dick condescended to bestow a superficial examination on the irons, but they did not interest him particularly; they were not in the old carpenter's line of business. "Hard set, I s'pose," he muttered, not meaning the irons, but their destined wearers.

"I should think they *was*," responded the constable. "They ought to swing now, if there's justice in the land. Bad business that 'ere testimony's fizzlin' out so just as the trial's coming on. The attorney's considerably knocked up, 'most as much as your old woman there. And well he may be; the country has its eye on him, sir; he's bound to get them fellers hung, and he knows it."

"Pirates, eh?"

"Yes, real black murderin' set! Pests o' commerce! dread of every blue-jacket that has shipped for the Indies these five year! Been waiting trial six weeks and more! Coming on 't half-past ten o'clock. Extra session — Supreme Court sits in the United States Court Room, New City Hall. You'll be there, sir, of course?"

The constable rattled off these items exultantly.

Van Hausen hesitated, and scratched his head with the whip-handle by way of clearing up his ideas. The tone, even more than the words of the constable, was suggestive of the fact that this great trial, on which the eyes of the whole country were fixed, was the only thing in New York worth

attending, for that day at least. But then the women — and Dick gave an uneasy glance in their direction. What to do with them? that was the question uppermost in the mind of the old bachelor, who to-day, almost for the first time in his life, was saddled with female incumbrances.

But it was no longer an open question. The constable's voice had a clear ring to it, and had gone echoing down the corridor. The words, "desperate gang," "court," "trial," and that one syllable which signified the extreme penalty of the law, had reached and charmed the ear of Hannah. They chimed in with the prevalent notion of her mind, especially at this moment, and acted on her like an inspiration. It was with an Amazonian stride, in place of her hobbling gait, that she now advanced down the corridor. "The court's assemblin', is it?" she asked with eagerness of the constable. "Then it's time I was there. Go on, man," to Dick; "we're comin'!"

In vain Dick protested, both by word and sign. In vain he pulled at her cloak — this time to hold her back — and cursed the whole female sex under his breath. Even the constable, pitying her error, took pains to inform her, with a shout, that this case had nothing to do with her affair; that it could throw no light on her husband's murder; that it related to crime committed at sea, &c. But Hannah was deaf now — incorrigibly deaf. She had her own ideas, her own vague instincts in the matter, and she was resolute. To court she would go. Had she not come to the city for that very purpose? What matter whose case it was? Was there not testimony to be given in, and bad deeds to be brought to light, and wicked men to be judged? Who knew what might come of it?

That Hannah really expected or hoped that anything would come of it was scarcely probable, for she was too keen in her faculties, despite her deafness and her years, to be easily self-deceived. But at all events the prospect of witnessing a trial — somebody's trial — was irresistible. It was

the sifting out of crime; the condemning of the guilty; it had a fascination for Hannah, and she was resolved to spend her day in a manner at least akin to the original intention.

Such was the greatness and fixedness of this resolve as to reduce her companions to mere ciphers. The constable was immeasurably tickled at the force of the old woman's will, now that it was fairly roused. He laughed heartily, exclaiming between whiles, "Come on, then! Sorry I can't go and escort you; there's nothing I should be prouder on, but I've got a part to perform in the 'play,'" — and he shook his handcuffs significantly. "Howsomever, I'll look out for you in the court-room," he condescendingly whispered to Angie. "Which way?" (in reply to an imperative query from Hannah) "Oh, you'll find it easy enough; you've only to follow the crowd."

They had threaded the passage-way and staircase, and reached the prison door as he said this.

A few individuals hastening along the street outside constituted that portion of the crowd which he motioned to Hannah to follow; and pressing as his business was, he could not help pausing an instant to indulge one more hearty laugh at the sight of the old woman striding vigorously forward in the effort to keep up with her leaders, and dragging the trembling, reluctant Angie along, rather than leaning on her for support.

As for Van Hausen, victim of his sister's valiant assertion of woman's rights, there was nothing left for him but to enlist meekly under her colours, and to follow her lead as she followed that of the crowd.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Contention for Places.

THE trial of a gang of notorious pirates would prove an eventful circumstance in any seaport city of the Old or New World. From the merchant whose rich cargoes have suffered, or may chance to suffer, from their depredations, to the poorest man or woman whose son has shipped as cabin-boy, all have an interest in the apprehension and conviction of ruffian hordes, whose cruelties wear a deeper aspect of horror from being added to the other perils of the deep, and whose remorselessness in the execution of their barbarities has made their very name synonymous with crimes of the darkest dye.

At the time of the arrest of Bullet and his gang this interest was rife in the community, and national invective was hurled with peculiar bitterness at this species of malefactors. Our late war with England, originating as it did in wrongs committed at sea, and fought out for the most part on that element, had concentrated public attention on the protection of our commerce and marine, and scarcely was that contest brought to a successful issue, when we were forced into a had-to-hand struggle with Algiers, whose piracies had rendered her the scourge of Europe no less than of our own country.

The courage and gallantry of Decatur, the glorious martyrdom of Somers and his sacrificial band, these and other deeds of daring and heroism had chained the dastardly tyrant of the Mediterranean, and given our infant navy her earliest title to a nation's praise, — a foretaste of the future triumphs which now fill her sails, as she sweeps on in the march of freedom; praise which has swelled into a hymn of thanksgiving, as we feel how, in this our day of trial, she girds us with her strength.

But piracy was rampant in those days; and though the

Mediterranean no longer levied black mail on the nations of the earth, plunderers still infested our Western waters, and no vessel had as yet a safe passport in the neighbourhood of the Caribbean Sea or the great Gulf. Voyages to the West Indies were precarious to life as well as cargo, and merchants sending ships thither were compelled to balance the probability of gain against the possible loss of vessels, merchandise, and crew.

Among the unenviable reputations achieved by these sea-marauders, none had attained so terrible a notoriety as that of *Bullet*, or the *Black Bull* of the Indies. This man's craftiness and rapacity as a freebooter, the autocratic tyranny with which he lorded it over his crew, and the cold-blooded cruelties practiced by him on his victims, had made his name a watchword of warning and terror. Various authorized avengers of the public, following in his track of blood and crime, had pursued his fast-sailing craft, and made every effort for her capture, but to no purpose. So mysteriously did she sometimes effect her escape, now favoured by darkness, now by fog, and now by some light breeze which seemed conjured up purposely to fill her sails, that among superstitious seafarers mystery was added to her other attributes, and she was half-believed to be a Phantom ship, only becoming a real monster at the moment of grappling with her prize. Even sober-minded individuals were staggered by reports of the audacity with which she pursued her prey, sometimes doubling on her own track, and crouching tiger-like at the very post lately held by Government sentries, from whom she had fled twenty-four hours before; yesterday, a fugitive; to-day, a destroyer.

Proportionate, therefore, to the alarm she had created and the evil she had accomplished, were the pride and satisfaction that prevailed among the citizens of our mercantile metropolis, when her career was suddenly checked, and that too not by the official arm of the naval service, but by the gallantry of our commercial marine. Many American vessels had then recently been engaged in privateering against Eng-

land; even merchantmen had been taught a lesson of self-protection, and most of our vessels could boast of a few guns and boarding implements, as well as some slight skill in their use. It was such an armament, consisting of an enterprising American captain, and his crew of not more than a dozen men, which had succeeded in bringing the Black Bull of the Indies to bay, and effecting the capture of the piratical vessel and its ruffianly owners. The gallant little merchantman, being bound on a circuitous voyage, had proceeded at once to our nearest naval station, and transferred her prisoners to an American frigate, by which, under Government auspices, they had been brought to New York for trial. The public sense of justice, amounting to an enthusiasm of abhorrence, had marked the reception of these felons on their arrival and introduction to the city prison. This sentiment had either palled, or been superseded by the every-day emotions of society, during the few months that they had been hid from the sight and knowledge of the community, awaiting trial; but it was roused into fresh vigour as the time approached which was to seal their fate; — triumph in their apprehension, curiosity as to their persons, and exciting rumours of the evidence against them, combined with hatred of their dark trade, in rendering them objects of universal discussion and interest, so that the constable who had recommended to Van Hausen to attend the trial was justified by fact, when he said of the counsel for the prosecution, that the country had its eye on him.

The sentiment of interest being thus universal, it naturally sent up to the trial representatives of all ranks in society. The solid men of the city, especially those directly engaged in commercial enterprises, thought it becoming in them to stimulate justice and countenance the law by their presence on this occasion. Aristocratic ladies (and New York had an aristocracy then far more select than in these days), neatly veiled their curiosity to see Bullet, that chief among villains, beneath the laudable ambition to hear the arguments of counsel in so stirring a case. Our sharp attorney on the side

of the prosecution, though a noted sifter of evidence, and a zealot in defence of the law, was less gifted in argument than some of his brethren at the bar; but in consideration of the importance of the case, Government had strengthened itself by securing the services of a veteran counsellor, the superiority of whose logical and persuasive powers was unquestioned.

Trump, the great legal orator, had been retained for the prisoner, at an enormous fee, it was whispered, and with the certainty of fabulous sums as the price of acquittal, for who knew (to such a height did rumour run) what wealth, the spoils of many nations, these robbers might have hid away in their island caves? The felon Bullet, his innocence but proved, might set himself up as a Monte Christo! It was a case that called for all Trump's powers, and more. He would exhaust the superb armoury of his great brain, and stun the jury with his eloquence. The big-paunched yellow coaches, with Knickerbocker arms on their panels, might honourably impede the halls of justice to-day, when such intellectual feasts were in preparation there.

Gigantic crimes electrify humanity. They up-heave the social strata, so that extremes meet. The same exaggerated reports of the Black Bull, his deeds and his accomplices, which, echoing and reverberating through the land, had reached the pinnacles of fashion, had also stirred the human dregs and caused them to rise to the surface. New York neither reared nor imported then so many desperadoes and Jezebels as at the present day, but she had her skulking-holes of crime, and her sinks of infamy, which belched forth boastful villains, drunk with the craving to look upon the hero in guilt whose notoriety they emulated; and penitent and degraded outcasts who instinctively flocked to the altar-fire of sin and ignominy, as moths to the candle in which their poor wings have been singed already. Honesty and industry, the great mediocrity of popular character and sentiment, justly set against crime and its perpetrators, formed the basis of the representation this day; but the most characteristic feature

of the assembly was the ruthlessness with which thieves and vagabonds elbowed the magnates of the land, and the assurance with which fallen women, bedaubed or begrimed, strove with the plumed and perfumed daughters of the aristocracy for precedence and place.

The locality in which the court held its sittings gave added interest and attractiveness to the occasion. The New City Hall (for it was then recently finished) was deservedly a subject of pride to the citizens, and the dignity of the building gave encouragement to the presence of citizens, and especially of ladies, who would have shrunk from ordinary court-rooms, while its central and conspicuous position, and the prospect of gaining free admission to its walls, swelled the crowd with idlers. Admission within the exterior walls of the building was, for the majority of the throng, the most that could be hoped, however. The court-room was manifestly too limited in its proportions to admit more than a fraction of the crowd; standing room in the halls or corridors leading thither was even a matter of chance, and in spite of the cold, no small part of the attendants on the trial were obliged to content themselves with scaling the windows for a peep inside, hanging round the doorways in anticipation of stray reports of what was transpiring within, or gathering in knots within the Park area, thrashing their arms to keep their blood from freezing, and compensating themselves for the disadvantage of enjoying only outside places, by the freedom with which they indulged in groans and howls for the prisoners, and invitations to them to come out and be eaten, trampled on, or even take their chance of a land fight, man to man.

These and similar demonstrations of excitement did not reach their height until near the close of the day, and when the vehemence of the population had increased with the progress of the trial. When Hannah Rawle and her companions entered the Park, it was comparatively early, and the passions of the rabble at the outposts had not been inflamed by expectancy and delay. Already, however, there was striking evidence of the interest that hung upon the trial.

Straggling processions of people were entering the Park from every direction, and converging towards the City Hall. Apparently it was filled to overflowing, for the front steps were crowded, and window and door-places began to be in request. But Hannah, undeterred by this discouragement, kept resolutely on her way. Her deaf ears were undisturbed by the clamours and disputes of the multitude with whom she was immediately involved; her broad shoulders seemed insensible to the press and conflict with numbers. So wholly was her stern will pre-occupied by her purpose in coming hither, that even if she could have distinguished the hootings of the boys who assailed her from the fences, tops of lamp-posts, and other "coignes of vantage," she would have responded to them only by indifference and contempt. As it was, there was a certain imposing grandeur in the way with which the old woman threw back her head and strode through the crowd towards her object, as if her purpose were sufficient passport. Perhaps it was this air of resolution even more than her years, or her rustic dress, which at once marked her for the boys' notice, and caused her to be hailed with the saucy salutation, "Walk up, granny! Make way for the old wolf-skin!" (the latter being an allusion to her voluminous yellow sables). "Don't wait outside there, I beg on yer; yer might ketch cold. Plenty o' room; walk in, marm, an' take a seat."

Apparently she took them at their word, for not until she was half-way up the front steps did she falter and come to a stand-still, firmly wedged in with the crowd. Angie was just behind her, one step lower down, panting and breathless, less from her rapid walk and struggle with the press than from the agitations of her heart and brain. Unlike Hannah, she experienced a momentary relief in the check put upon their progress. She would have been only too glad if it could have been balked altogether. With what face could she witness a trial, the very purpose of which she had been doing her best to defeat? How dared she set her foot within walls sacred to that justice with which she had tampered? She would

have preferred to stand all day a humble waiter at the threshold.

They were by this time a little separated from Van Hausen, who, usually bold as a lion in pushing his way among his compeers, was, as I have said, but a reluctant and sheepish attendant on women, and had therefore suffered several ranks of people to intervene between himself and them. Otherwise he would have taken advantage, even now, of the fresh arguments that offered themselves, and endeavoured to persuade Hannah to abandon her object. One needed only to look at her face to see how vain such efforts would have been. Watchfulness, combined with indomitable patience, made up its expression, and proved the force of her resolution.

Fortune is the friend of a strong will, and fortune befriended Hannah. She, fortune, came in gusts, — often her way. The first shock was the arrival of his honour, the judge, escorted by the sheriff and heralded by a squad of constables. The crowd made way of course for the chief magistrate of the occasion. Everybody but Hannah stood staring and agape, watching his passage; but she, blind to everything but her own interest in getting forward, pressed into his wake, and Angie following, both were wafted into the inner hall not far from the entrance to the court-room. Here the judge and his escort were suddenly swallowed up by a baize-covered door, which swung noiselessly open to admit them to some waiting-room, or private passage leading to the farther end of the court-room. The wedge which had forced an entrance for the old woman and her attendant thus suddenly withdrawn, the crowd collapsed and shut them in between two human walls. They were still carried onward, though almost imperceptibly, by the pressure from behind, when suddenly a diversion took place in the popular mind. A report had reached the front ranks that they were bringing in the prisoners; that a sight of them might be obtained outside, at the rear of the building; and now, while the throng without were pressing to get in, the throng within were pressing still more violently to go out. Hannah and Angie were driven

back almost on the shoulders of the crowd, wafted as it were by an ebb tide; but the human waves that had forced for themselves an exit soon returned, angry and clamorous, to swell the onward flow. It was nothing but a trick, a sham; the prisoners were safely lodged in the dock already, the trial was about to begin, and at this assurance on the authority of a constable who had officiated as one of their escort, the rush, the quarrelling, and the squabbling reached their height. Hannah and Angie, victims of this contention, were in danger of being smothered, strangled, annihilated. Not that Hannah was daunted. Tall, strong and determined, she defended herself with her elbows, her fists, her voice; even the boys, ten times worse in a crowd than men, charged in vain against the iron wall of her stern resolve. Alone, she might have held her ground, maintained her progress; but Angie was a clog upon her. Angie, exhausted and faint, was frightened, bewildered, and so of course undone. Staggering, falling, trampled on at last, the right and left thrusts of her companion alone saved her from serious injury. Whether the report, "A woman down! They are trampling on her! She is dying!" called for official interference, or whether chance brought help at this crisis, is a matter of doubt. Certain it is, however, that this extremity turned the scale of fortune suddenly in favour of our couple of adventurers, for a constable, the constable who had just been giving information to the crowd, the very constable of the prison, Hannah's champion and Angie's admirer, came at this moment to the rescue, took the unfortunate in charge, waived off the crowd by the magic of his badge of authority, and before they knew how or whence deliverance had come, they had found the sesame to the mysterious green door by which the judge had disappeared, and were in a dark, damp lobby, with plenty of breathing room, and the roar and rush of the crowd without sounding through the muffled door like the surge and murmur of an angry sea, from which they had been saved by a miracle. The cheering admonitions and encouragement of their rescuer, together with the wholesome scolding ad-

ministered by Hannah, soon restored Angie to presence of mind, and enabled her to suppress the hysterical throes and nervous tremor which for some moments threatened to master her. Though bruised and panting, nearly strangled by the strings of her hood, and with her old silk mandarin rent in several places, she had escaped further injury, and in reply to the interrogations of the constable and the pertinacity of Hannah, soon declared herself able to proceed. She shrank, however, as her glance rested on the door by which they had found safety, and shuddered at the execrations and threats that now and then went up from the crowd. After all, who knows which had overcome her most, the violence of the press, or the deep mutterings, the prophetic imprecations, which all around her had united in heaping on the criminals, whose blood they claimed at the hands of the law? They would have torn her to pieces perhaps, had they suspected the part she had just been playing, and how she had cheated the righteous vengeance they were here to vindicate. Outcast of society, friend of the depraved, what better fate did she deserve than to be trampled under the foot of justice!

"Don't you be afeard, miss," was the constable's prompt reply to these instinctive thrills of alarm on Angie's part. "I hain't the slightest idea of letting you get into such a scrape as that again. I know all about crowds, I do; I'll take care of you" (in his patronizing way); "come with me;" and motioning to Hannah to follow, he commenced piloting Angie along the dark lobby, and thence up a winding staircase which branched off in an opposite direction to the private entrance by which the judge had gained access to the courtroom. This stairway was dark and steep, and at the top of it a heavy door barred their further progress; but the constable, who was familiar with its spring, threw it noiselessly open, and they were instantly greeted by a flood of light, a murmur of voices, and the sight of a closely-packed assembly; not such a rude press as that from which they had just so thankfully made their escape, but a well-dressed female assembly, for the most part accommodated with seats, but where these

were wanting, occupying apparently every inch of standing room. It was the gallery of the court-room, reserved on this occasion for ladies only; and its seats had been filled, since an early hour in the morning, by the wives and daughters of the judge and principal lawyers in attendance on the trial, and such other ladies as were willing to brave the ordeal of a protracted session, in close quarters and bad air, for the sake of gratifying their curiosity or thirst for exciting oratory.

Among the gentry thus accommodated, there was a sprinkling of females of a different quality — tawdrily and showily decked out, while the standing room outside the gay circle, presented here and there, brought out in strong relief against the white wall of the building, the shabby figure and wild haggard face of some poor vagrant, familiar enough with the precincts of courts to know where to find the best places, and bold enough to press in anywhere.

Angie, thankful just now for shelter and safety, and anxious to avoid observation, would gladly have taken a standing position just inside the entrance door and on the outskirts of the gallery. Hannah, too, would have been content with a situation which, being the most elevated that the court-room afforded, commanded a panoramic view of the whole; but their conductor was not one of that sort of men who do things by halves.

“You see, miss,” he whispered to Angie, “I’ve brought you to the court-end, and now I’m going to get the young woman that I admire, and the old woman that I respect, the best seats here.” Upon which he began to push his way down the steps of the little middle aisle leading to the front row of seats. A man among so many women, and that man wearing a constable’s badge, was an authority not to be questioned. The timid and yielding, who were huddled on the steps, readily made room; one, more obstinate than the rest, and whom the constable almost stumbled over, was taken by the shoulder and rudely thrust aside, with the words, “Deuce take yer, Mad Moll, you’re always in the way!” “A little room, if you please, ladies,” was his conciliatory tone to the

aristocratic fair ones, who were disposed to maintain their ground. "This way, ma'am — this way!" as he beckoned Hannah and the reluctant Angie on. "One, two, three, four, five," and as he counted, his inexorable finger marked off the occupants of the front seat, "room for six ladies; them seats always accommodates six! Here 's a place for you, mum!" to Hannah, who was hobbling slowly to the front. "Move up and make room, *if* you please, ladies," in a tone which meant, "whether you please or not." "This old lady has an interest in the trial; come twenty miles or more to attend it."

Slowly, reluctantly, measuring the inflexible eye of the constable to detect any chance of his relenting, the silked and feathered ladies drew their narrow skirts around them, and with cross looks and a complaining murmur, moved up. A slender, airy dame, the outside occupant of the seat, withdrew her person as far as she could; and as Hannah's stiff, unbending form settled squarely into the space allotted to her, fastidiously strove to protect her satin pelisse from contact with the old woman's camlet cloak. Meanwhile the occupants of neighbouring seats, undisturbed in their possessions, stared unmercifully at Hannah and Angie as "persons interested in the trial." "Mother and sweetheart of one of the murderers perhaps," — so the whisper went round — round even to the ears of Angie, who having followed Hannah to the front, where no seat was yet provided for her, was left at this moment standing, the most conspicuous person in the house. The constable had in vain counted up the numbers on the opposite side front; there was no vacancy there. Angie would have retreated if she could, but those behind had reseated themselves and hemmed her in; the constable had gone to fetch a camp-stool; he had whispered this intention to her, and then disappeared with the parting assurance, "I'll have to hand it down to you over the heads of the crowd; but never fear, I'll make sure that you get it."

While awaiting its arrival, however, there was nothing for Angie but to stand, crimson with fear and embarrassment,

more prominent than the prisoners in the dock, and a scarcely less pitiable object. She had drawn her hood as far as possible over her face; she had tucked behind and under it, as well as she could, her stray curling locks, for the comb that should have held them had dropped out, and been lost in the crowd. With womanly instinct, she had brushed the dust from her scant mandarin, and attempted to fold it so as to hide the rents; but nothing could soothe or hide her features, distorted by mortification and alarm. The emotions already alluded to would have been sufficient to account for such an expression, but within a moment past it had been aggravated by a more fearful sensation; for she had just had a vision, — had met a phantom in her path; — pale, emaciated, wild, it had fixed her with its stare; it had vanished, but it transfixed her still. Her own humiliating position, the murmur of suspicion that attached to her as one interested in the trial, the watchful, accusing eyes, — she was conscious of them all; but what kept her planted there, so still and horror-struck, was, more than all, the certainty that, for the second time to-day, she had seen, overtopping all other faces, blinding her to all others, the face of a ghost.

It was a female form this time, and a face that had once been the face of a girl. But now a soul in purgatory, a blasted spirit, looked out from that same tenement of clay with which Angie had long ago been familiar. What could it mean? Were all the visions that had haunted her heart for years to become realities to-day? One by one were the secret companions of her memory to rise up and confront her in the face of all the world? Was this, then, the day of doom? this place the judgment? Were the degraded, the lost, the very dead, to reappear in testimony? and here and now were the secrets of all hearts to be unveiled?

A little while ago, and she had triumphed in the consciousness of having disarmed fate. In the agitation of the present moment, she felt it closing in upon her, and no longer resisting, she braced herself to meet the shock.

No wonder that when the camp-stool came at last, and, by

the constable's peremptory order, was passed down to her she failed to see it; that when it was pointed out, and even set up for her use close beside Hannah, she took no notice; and that, embarrassing as her situation was, she would have continued standing for an indefinite period, scrutinizing the sea of faces above her with an expectant gaze, had not Hannah given her a smart jerk, at the same time saying, in a loud, shrill key, which made everybody laugh, — "*Set down, Angie Cousin! do you s'pose folks behind can see right through yer?*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Principal Witness.

MEANWHILE the court had been called to order, the jury impanelled, the indictment read, and the prisoners' plea — "*Not guilty*" — received and recorded. The counsel for the prosecution now rose. Angie's attention was at once concentrated upon the wiry figure and keen nervous features of the lawyer, who, as he stood with both hands resting by the finger-tips on the green table round which his legal brethren were grouped, was, from her immediate recognition of his person, and from the attitude he occupied, of one about to address the court, the single object that arrested her eye. Hannah recognized him too, and signified the fact by a shove of Angie's elbow, and the words, "*I vum, Angie, that 'ere's the same little red-faced man we jest see so fooled in the gaol yonder.*"

At this moment the prosecuting attorney was the centre of all eyes and ears, so that Hannah's remark escaped general notice. A few of her neighbours overheard it, however, and thereupon scanned her and Angie with increased curiosity and remark. "*In the gaol!*" They had just come from there! Of course, then, they were related to the prisoners! That settled it.

In accordance with the anticipations of the audience, the

Government attorney should now have proceeded to open his case, but to the disappointment and chagrin of everybody present, he addressed himself to the court instead of the jury, and boldly solicited a postponement of the trial. He had been disappointed of one of his principal witnesses; the man was ill and unable to testify; the interests of justice required that his testimony should be heard; and much as the attorney regretted the inconvenience that might arise from an adjournment, he trusted that, in consideration of the importance of the case, and the terrible and weighty charges which were to be proved, the court would grant a reasonable delay.

The judge, taken wholly by surprise, manifested his astonishment at so unexpected a proposition; and the counsel for the prisoners, seizing his advantage, sprang to his feet and entered a forcible protest against any delay as a gross perversion of law, and an injustice to his clients. Earnestly did Trump declaim upon the fact that the law must know no prejudices; that his clients, although accused of dark crimes, had all the more claim to an early trial, — an early acquittal he might say, so strong was his conviction of the result. Sagaciously did he point out how thus far every advantage had been on the side of the Government; feelingly did he allude to the cruel imprisonment the accused had already suffered during a most inclement season, and the patience with which they and he, their advocate, had awaited the uncertain arrival of the vessel, just in port, which brought with it the principal witnesses for the prosecution — witnesses whom his legal brother, the opposite counsel, had openly boasted were enough to ensure conviction ten times over. The present evasion of justice, so he unhesitatingly continued, must be a mere quibble, a pretence; the prosecution, doubtless, knew the weak points in their case. He himself was prepared to see such groundless charges as those brought against his clients fall to pieces for the want of any foundation; but he had hardly expected to see them fade out in the very commencement of the conflict, and disappear “like the baseless fabric of a vision.”

What with bluster, pathos, and Shakespeare, Trump had wrought himself up to quite a pitch of excitement already; he had made some impression, too, on the jury and the audience; this he always did, — he had a magnetic power over audiences and juries.

But the counsel for the prosecution understood Trump, and opposed him with his customary tactics, — sarcasm, scorn, contempt, real or pretended. He did not even deign to look at him, — simply condescending so far as to explain to the judge, in a snappish sort of way, that he was ready to proceed with the case if the court chose, in its leniency, to grant this indulgence to the *gentlemen*, who, accustomed to the life of freebooters, were naturally weary of imprisonment, and who, so long in the habit of carrying matters with a high hand, expected, no doubt, through their counsel to make Justice herself walk the plank. He was quite prepared to meet his adversary, the counsel for the defendants. A week ago he had neither dreamed of nor wished for further testimony than that at his command to-day; a finish and *éclat* had, indeed, recently been provided to this great revelation of crime, by a past accomplice of the prisoners, who had professed a readiness to turn State's evidence; facts already deposed by him had an important bearing on the case. As proof and warning of the extent to which human nature might be brutalized and depraved, these subsidiary facts ought not to be withheld from the court and the community. He left the decision confidently, however, to the superior wisdom of the presiding judge.

The judge, deaf as became his office to mere declamation, and steeled against dramatic effects, looked simply to facts, or, at most, probabilities in the case. Was this deficiency in the evidence for the Government, one which it was the duty of the prosecuting officer to have foreseen and provided against? Or, if wholly accidental, could it be remedied by delay? What was the nature of the witness's illness, and what his chance of recovery? The learned counsel was, of course, aware that, in capital cases, depositions of testimony

were of no avail; the evidence must be given in person, and in presence of the accused. What probability was there that at a later day this testimony would be forthcoming?

These, and similar pertinent inquiries on the part of the court, compelled a closer investigation than was consistent with the interests of the attorney for the prosecution; not that he based much hope on a postponement of the trial, or had any sanguine expectation that it would be granted by the court. The proposition for delay had been urged chiefly in compliance with the demands of the eloquent counsellor appointed to assist him through this important trial, and conduct the argument. This gentleman had been greatly staggered by the quashing of the important points of evidence which Bly had been expected to furnish, and it was to satisfy his associate, — perhaps, too, in order to make the most of his lost testimony by publicly deploring it, — that the attorney had put in his plea for a postponement. Brief as had been his interview with Bly, it had served to convince him of the hopelessness of any attempt to extract information from his obstinately-sealed lips, — lips which the lawyer believed would soon be eternally sealed; for so shocked had he been by the wasted appearance and cataleptic torpor in which he had found his anticipated witness, that he greatly doubted whether, if brought into court and willing to testify, he would prove capable of furnishing coherent evidence.

Everyway, now, circumstances were telling against the prosecuting counsel, and in favour of the prisoners. The judge's inquiries served to extract truths which made the arguments for a postponement seem forced and trivial, not to say suspicious and unreal. The gaoler and his assistant, being called up and questioned in regard to the promised witness, unfortunately dwelt more upon his unwillingness than upon his inability to testify. The gaoler himself, mindful of the promised reward in the Baultie Rawle case, had not quite despaired of shaking Bly's resolution of silence, if only sufficient time were allowed; but the head-turnkey, Tracy, who was cherishing no such secret hopes, blurted out the

truth in the face of everybody, by repeating the very words of the terrible oath with which Bly had sworn "never to blab."

This ended the discussion. The court, somewhat imperatively, decided that the grounds for a postponement were insufficient. The trial must proceed. The audience, disgusted at such sham pretences for delaying what they had all come hither to see and hear, were gratified at the decision; the jury, warned of a deficiency in the evidence, and overawed by Trump's self-confidence, subtracted one point from their mental counts against the accused. The counsel for the defence, conscious of this advantage, ran his fingers through his hair in a triumphant, defiant manner. On the other hand, the prosecuting attorney saw himself worsted, and feeling that he had made a mistake, got more red and flustered than ever; and, out of humour with the court, his own assistant, as well as the opposing counsel, and, worst of all, with himself, was in no state for coolly opening his case or conducting the examination of witnesses, which was to succeed, with his customary acumen and skill.

Angie, who up to this moment had sat aghast, with lips parted and ears strained, drew a long breath.

They were resolved to wring the truth from Bly after all; to force open his lips at last, and blast her with the chance-droppings therefrom, — this much of the attorney's purpose she had comprehended, in spite of legal forms, — but the attempt had failed; it was ruled otherwise; the judge had determined (bless him!) to leave the poor wretch to his silence, and her to her peace — that comparative peace, at least, which she had striven so hard to secure; and so, having breasted one more wave of this day's storm, she breathed again. But as a vessel in the trough of a heavy sea pauses only to gird herself for the next shock, so Angie, with all her powers close-reefed and fortified, sat braced up, erect, expectant.

Everybody about her was listening attentively to the statement of the attorney, who was rehearsing to the jury the

facts he proposed to prove, — everybody but Hannah; and she was sufficiently engrossed in watching the proceedings through her spectacles. Angie could not yet weigh and digest the events of the morning; in the present momentary security and calm, she could only lock them up in her own breast, and patiently keep guard upon them. Beyond that, all she had to do, all she could do, was to preserve a show of calmness, and as far as possible deport herself like any other spectator on the occasion. It aided her in this endeavour to fix her eye upon the speaker, and follow his voice. This concentration of her powers, at first mechanical, after awhile became real. It was impossible that she could be indifferent to the main features of a trial with the prosecution of which she had unintentionally interfered; otherwise, exciting as they might be to the general community, she would have been unable, burdened as she was, to follow with interest the details of crimes with which she had no concern. But circumstances had made her an associate in the business now before the court, and her attention once caught and riveted to the statement of the district attorney, she soon became, not only in pretence but in fact, one of his keenest and most absorbed listeners.

Occasionally, indeed, her attention wandered, drawn, as it were, by magnetism, to other parts of the house. One of these side glances revealed to her the stout labour-bent form of Van Hausen, who had worked his way to the front ranks of the audience, just outside the rail that protected the circle of lawyers from intrusion, and who, leaning on his rustic whip-handle, was drinking in the attorney's statement of charges about to be proved, his honest face at once incredulous and horror-struck. Apparently it would require proof upon proof to convince him that men could be so wicked. A picture of sturdy goodness the old man was, — a human protest against crime. For this very reason, perhaps, his presence there, just opposite to her, disconcerted Angie. He was so suspicious of her — so unfriendly always.

And again, she gave a little nervous start, as something

withered, brown, and crumpled, winding its way insidiously through the crowd just beneath the gallery, flashed upon her like a snake in the grass, and then was lost to sight again. It was a sly old face and form that she had no trouble in recognizing. She did not even question why it should be here. Every familiar feature of her past life was coming to the surface to-day — why not Diedrich Stein? Still, though she almost immediately lost sight of him, the knowledge of his presence gave her an uneasy sensation, such as one has with the consciousness of vermin in the vicinity.

The buccaneers, five in number, who were on trial for their life, were seated in the dock. The interest of the trial centred in them, of course. Their faces were visible to the jury and the various officers of the law, as well as to that small portion of the assembly who had obtained advantageous positions opposite the dock, but a high wooden partition quite concealed their persons from everybody in the rear. Even from the front of the gallery only the backs of their heads and shoulders were discernible, so that the attention of the audience was in no degree abstracted from the attorney and his opening argument by the otherwise irresistible temptation to watch the varying expression on the countenances of the accused.

It was the old story of deception, robbery, and cruelty, all summed up in the dark word, Piracy; a story so old, a deed so dark, as almost to be forgotten and lost in oblivion, but for the recent revival of the crime which makes it now a familiar outrage. But lawless freebooters may yet claim legal sanction for their deeds, and indifference to others' rights may be fostered by sophistry or imaginary wrongs. In some instances, too, life may be held sacred while property is sacrificed, and the eyes of neutrals may be blinded to the outrage by a certain pretence of justice and discrimination. No such affectation of mercy, no such partial distinctions, softened the crimes of these men, or qualified their deeds. Enemies as they were of all nations, vessels under every flag had become their natural prey. If the statement of the

attorney were credible, murder had been their pastime, and nameless deeds of horror had been committed by them in cold blood. I say by *them*, for all shared the guilt; but while listening to the lawyer's burning words (with such a topic they could not be other than words of fire), the audience almost forgot, in their deadly indignation against the leader, Bullet, that his associates had any voluntary partnership in his acts. So tyrannic, so terrible had been this man's mastery over his men, so fierce and so cruel had been the despotism of his iron will, that while he had borne the part of an arch-fiend, they seemed to have served simply as his tools; while he had been the ally of iniquity, they had been its slaves. So intense was this man's personality in the minds of the audience, so plainly did it appear that every deed of darkness and infamy had been planned by his cool brain and executed by his pitiless decree, that at this opening phase of the trial, and with the uncertainty attending its result, the assembly would unanimously have voted for the immediate acquittal of every other man of the gang, on the condition that Bullet should expiate his crimes on the gallows.

The attorney's heat had proved effectual. It had fired the audience, — and in the right direction too, for Bullet was not only the deepest dyed villain, but he was the principal in the indictment; his conviction was essential to that of his associates; and the main point secured, the fate of the whole gang was beyond a question.

But heat is not the only quality effectual in an advocate, neither is it an element always to be controlled. The attorney, warmed with his subject, unfortunately went too far; and in boasting of the proof he meant to bring, forgot himself, and inserted more than one point of testimony for which he was wholly dependent on Bly. His cooler ally, the counsellor, endeavoured to warn and check him, but it was too late; he had betrayed the missing links in his chain of evidence, and Trump, armed at all points, had made a note of it. This circumstance, of which the attorney almost instantly became conscious, disconcerted him, and chilled his ardour.

The peroration of his argument was wanting in the brilliancy which had until now marked it, and he sat down at last considerably flustered, and with that consciousness of failure which had acted as a discouraging influence upon him since the early disappointment of the morning, and which promised to be cumulative in its effect upon his efforts throughout the day.

Witnesses for the Government were now summoned in turn, sworn, and their testimony taken. They were few in number. A former United States consul at Pernambuco furnished convincing proof of the depredations of the pirates, and the sufferings of their victims, and the supercargo of a ship now in port recognized and pointed out among trophies taken from the persons of the accused, or from their vessels, instruments of navigation and other articles of value belonging to the officers and owners of a hitherto mysteriously missing barque. Excepting these, the witnesses for the Government consisted wholly of the captain, boatswain, and one of the crew of the merchantman that had captured the pirate craft. The remainder of her officers and men had shipped in some other vessel, or been left behind in the foreign port which she had since visited. They were examined in the inverse order of their intelligence and the importance of their testimony. The first, a rough but honest sailor, gave a sufficiently clear narrative of the detection and pursuit of the notorious pest of the sea, the desperate defence she had made, the coolness and gallantry of his own commander, — upon whose prowess and heroism the loyal tar was so tempted to descant, that the court was continually compelled to recall him to points more essential to the case in hand, — and finally, the capture of the pirate chief and his men, and their identity with the prisoners now present at the bar. The boatswain confirmed the sailor's evidence, adding to it also a complete description of the vessel's piratical outfit, and furnishing a graphic account of her destruction by an explosion of her powder magazine, to which her villanous and artful crew had laid a train just before their surrender, doubt-

less intending the destruction of her captors; but the explosion came too late for their purpose; not until the vessel had been stripped of her ill-gotten valuables and left to her fate did the fire reach the mine, and blast and scatter to the waves a craft defiled by almost every form of crime.

So far the evidence was clear, thrilling, and perfectly satisfactory. With all his cross-questioning and brow-beating, Trump — the oily-tongued Trump — the thunderer — failed to confuse these men, strong in their simple self-confidence, or to detect any contradiction in their testimony.

And now the captain of the merchantman, hero of both of the previous narratives, was summoned to the stand.

The appearance and bearing of this young man created a marked sensation. And well it might. Drowned by his own act five years ago, identified beyond a doubt, and buried in an outcast's grave, he had risen at length, and come hither to the judgment!

"Your name?" questioned the attorney.

"George Rawle."

"Formerly of New Jersey, now master of the barque 'Antelope?'"

"The same, sir."

Ay, the same! Years of exile, struggle, and toil, had invigorated his manhood, knit his sinewy frame more firmly, embrowned his cheek, and shaded his smooth features with a beard of luxuriant growth. Many an associate of his boyhood and youth might have been deceived by the disguise that time and change had put upon him; but the eye that had loved him — never. Or had form and expression been metamorphosed, which they were not, the first notes of his clear, ringing voice would have sounded in the ears of some there present like responses to the trumpet that wakes the dead.

Yes, it was George Rawle! our Geordie! another, and yet the same! The fact was beyond question. Buried out of sight for five long years, he had come back at last to claim as a right his name and place among men.

But the right was almost instantly challenged. Already Angie's champion, the ubiquitous constable, was whispering significantly in the ear of Trump, and before the Government attorney could address another question to his witness, the counsel for the defendants forestalled him.

"I am sorry to interrupt my legal brother," he exclaimed, addressing himself to the judge, "or to disappoint him by throwing discredit upon his principal witness; but your honour will justify me, I hope, in entering a protest against this testimony, and warning the gentlemen of the jury against lending an ear to falsehood. The man upon the stand is himself a living lie, your honour. The individual whom he claims to represent has been dead for several years. I have witnesses here ready to testify to the fact."

But Trump was scattering his words to the air. Other and contrary testimony to that he had at hand was nearer, truer, more touchingly real.

"Let me over, I say! Stand back, you upstart feller, or I'll knock yer down!" was shouted a few steps in the lawyer's ear. One stalwart leg cased in homespun kersey was thrust across the rail, and a common cart-whip was threateningly raised against a deputy-sheriff who was vainly striving to force back the intruder. "Geordie, my boy, God bless yer!" was the eager, tremulous cry that succeeded, as flinging the other leg over the barrier, and thrusting back the sheriff with a vehemence that scorned all opposition, old Van Hausen half-touched, half-tumbled among the circle of startled lawyers. Geordie saw, sprang, met him half way, and tears started to the eyes of both strong men, while two hard hands were clasped — each as in a vice.

"It's him!" broke from the trembling lips of the old carpenter, as touch confirmed the evidence of sight; and again, looking round to the wondering audience as if for sympathy — "It's him; it's our Geordie, as I'm alive! It's my own boy, hearty and four-square as ever, after all! For God's sake, where did yer come from, Geordie?" stammered forth the

simple old man, the hand that was disengaged laid inquiringly and tenderly on the young man's shoulder. "Why, man, we'd gin yer up for dead years ago!"

It was an all-engrossing emotion which this meeting awakened. In the intensity of the moment, both George and Van Hausen had been indifferent to the gaze of a thousand strangers, had even looked to them for sympathy. But already the former's attention was wandering; Van Hausen's question was a natural and imperative outburst, but it fell unheard. Already George's eyes were wandering over the sea of curious, upturned faces, and all his senses were strained but mute attendants to his beating heart. For slowly, steadily approaching, in a species of triumphal progress that would have been a mockery had the occasion been one whit less real, was a grotesque object, — a figure so shrunken, so insignificant, so thin and shadowy, as would certainly have been swamped in the crowd, but that borne aloft on the shoulders of two men in sailors' dress, and moving with sailors' undulating tread, it swayed gradually but surely to the front. Its very strangeness proved its passport; the crowd parted before it; even the court officials drew back, forgetful of their duty, and, without opposition, heralded indeed by the buzz and rumour that their approach awakened, the exultant rollicking mariners came on. Poor, half-drunken sailors they were, but their elation of spirit was well-timed, and favoured the accomplishment of their purpose. Inspired partly by grog, partly by the novelty of their task, and wholly undismayed by numbers or the dignity of the occasion, these self-appointed trophy-bearers never paused nor flinched, but making straight for the charmed ring, the legal sanctum within which George and Van Hausen had just clasped hands, they gained the railing, and elevated their burden triumphantly above it.

With one bound, George had freed himself from Van Hausen's grasp, and cleared the space betwixt him and the barrier; and with manly arms, stretched wide to claim the

proffered gift, and his heart aglow with a warm instinctive throb — the earliest, purest throb a human heart can ever know — he received his poor old mother, and folded her to his breast.

Van Hausen, bewildered, incredulous of the possibility of what was passing before his eyes, held up his hands in sheer amazement. The grave judge on the bench neglected, in the interest of the scene, to have the court called to order; the lawyers involuntarily paused in the labour of weighing any other evidence than that of their senses; the jury, forgetting to be arbiters, were conscious only that they were men, and the audience, taking advantage of the distraction on the part of the authorities, or carried away by an enthusiasm of sympathy which would not be repressed, sent up a simultaneous cheer.

This last was so manifestly out of place and unallowable, that the first outburst of it recalled every responsible man to his post. Before it could be repeated, the crier stood up and enjoined silence; the sheriff and his constables proceeded to enforce it, and immediately silence succeeded — a silence more impressive and sympathetic even than the previous burst of cheer. By this time, too, the witness on the stand had recovered his self-possession; the little old woman whose arrival upon the scene had created so serious a disturbance, had been handed over to the care and protection of Van Hausen, and George, with folded arms and a calmness that proved the masterly self-control of the young man, stood awaiting further examination.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Denunciation.

As we none of us, while yet in the flesh, can know what it is to die, so none of us, with rare exceptions, can know what it is to welcome back the dead, or those believed to be such. In intensity and degree the emotion can only be compared to the shock of sudden bereavement; but even that is a less amazing fact, since sooner or later all must die, while the law can never be broken but by a miracle which forbids soul and body once parted to be reunited in the flesh. As the earth seems to fall from beneath our feet when one who is walking life's path with us suddenly sinks into the grave, so at his reappearance it must be as if Heaven itself had stooped and dropped a blessing down, — a blessing which faith has promised hereafter, but which no ray of hope has taught us to look for here.

In these days of terrible uncertainty, long suspense, premature despair, which are breaking hearts all over this our land, such instances of earthly resurrection may not be rare. God grant that there may be many such gleams of rapture breaking through the clouds heavy with a nation's pain! God grant that the lives of the lost may be so pure from every stain, that if found again they may be found spotless, and be welcomed back like the pearl of great price.

Such a welcome did old Van Hausen's honest heart and Hannah's stern one give to George. But, alas! for his mother and Angie!

Already, evading Van Hausen's charge, Margery had crouched down upon the lowest step of the little platform which constituted the witness-stand. With her knees drawn up beneath her narrow dress of black bombazette, her hands clasped and tightly compressed above them, and her little wizened face peering out from the wide cap-border and tall poke bonnet, which made her features look even more minia-

ture and quaint than Nature had designed them, she sat, now casting an agonized look upon her son, now fixing a defiant gaze upon the assembled court. Like a startled bird, panting, frightened, but every whit a mother, who has planted herself on the edge of her nest between danger and her brood, so the trembling little woman, perched at her son's feet, between him and the officers of the dread tribunal before which he stood, felt no doubt as if her mere presence there kept the hounds of the law at bay. For what did she know of courts, except that they judged men to death? Or, knowing all else that she knew, for what could she suspect that her son stood there except to be doomed?

At George's sudden reappearance,— at the first sound of his voice, Angie's heart had leaped up, then as suddenly ceased to beat; the hot blood had rushed to her face and scorched her brain, to be succeeded by deadly paleness and clammy drops of sweat that started out upon her brow. She had first sprung to her feet, then dropped heavily upon her knees, in which latter attitude she continued fixed as stone, her hands grasping the rail that ran around the gallery, her chin supported by her hands. These were but faint indications of the emotions that seized and alternated within her; — joy and horror, longing and dread, thanksgiving and despair. Packed as the gallery was behind her, — impossible as it was for her to move, — her first impulse would have been to turn and endeavour to struggle to him through the crowd, but for the contrary impulse, which bade her rather keep quiet, deny his identity, beseech him by some imploring gesture to depart, fly, bury himself once more in oblivion. Excited, unreasoning, mad with love and fear, her senses first reeled, then seemed benumbed; joy proved but a deeper shock of pain, — relief but an aggravation of woe.

But no one observed all this. She made no noise. Her sudden starting up was only the prelude to a similar act on the part of many who, on the strange apparition of Margery, rose up, and even leaned far over the gallery to watch her novel and eccentric progress through the crowd; or if Angie's

breath came quick and hard, and her breast heaved with something between a shriek of rapture and a groan of despair, these symptoms of agitation and agony were swallowed up in the congratulatory cheering and clapping of hands, which were simultaneous.

Hannah's emotions, however, were more obstreperous and voluble. "It's George Rawle!" she cried, grasping Angie by the arm. "Lord bless me! Am I in the body or out on't? Who said he was dead? This world's made up o' lies! — it's our George, or else it's his ghost; an' tain't no ghost nuther, for he never looked so hale an' hearty in his life. That's right! — shake hands with him, Dick!" as she continued her observations; and again, "I vum, if there ain't our Margery comin' inter court a pig-back! O Lud! what's comin' next? O Lud! O Lud! that I should live to see the lad agin! in this here courth'us too! Why, it's like the findin' o' Joseph in Egypt!"

Hannah's exclamations and her soliloquy (it was truly the latter, for she addressed no one — she did not even claim Angie's attention) were so protracted, that when the sudden hush was enforced in the court-room they became audible, and not only absorbed for a moment the interest of those about her, but would have proved an interruption to the trial, had she not been almost instantly checked by the restraining and monitory gestures of the fine lady next her, as well as by a deputy-sheriff who had entered the gallery purposely to enforce silence, and who tapped her with his pole just in time to prevent her attracting the attention of George himself, which she was apparently endeavouring to do.

"This is all very well; quite dramatic, indeed!" were the words with which Trump first broke the pause that succeeded the congratulations of the audience. "It is a well-conceived scene; my legal brother deserves great credit for the exhibition. The young man's friends seem to be very glad to see him back from his voyage. If I were one of his friends, I have no doubt I should be very glad to see him myself; but the gentlemen of the jury must be aware that all

this fails to establish a good character for the witness, or to prove that he is the man he claims to be. If the court will allow, I should like to put a few questions to him."

The doubt and suspicion thus suggested grated against the universal sympathy in a scene whose genuineness nobody could justly question. The judge even hesitated about acceding to Trump's motion, but in default of a positive prohibition the lawyer commenced his cross-questioning.

"How long have you been absent from the country?"

"Just five years."

"And your family have heard nothing from you all this while?"

"Nothing."

"And believed you dead?"

"So it seems."

"Such mysterious disappearances are very unusual, young man!" spoken sarcastically.

"They are, sir, thank Heaven!"

"How came you to leave your home and country in such haste as to admit of no leave-taking, or knowledge of your whereabouts? In my legal experience, when men run away, disappear, seek to be forgotten, it is generally for some good reason, — or some *bad* reason rather!"

There was more than insinuation in Trump's tone, — there was insolence and menace; his face, too, wore the threatening frown which it always assumed when he desired to browbeat a witness.

The young man coloured, and for an instant became confused, — precisely what the lawyer intended.

"Unless," he continued, improving his advantage, "you can account for yourself, and prove your identity more satisfactorily, why the jury must take your evidence for what it is worth, and no more."

George had been embarrassed at the very first words of the lawyer's question, but he was in no degree cowed. Trump had mistaken his man, and gone too far. As collected and as cool now as if on the deck of his own ship, with his clear

blue eye full of honest indignation, and his lip proudly set, he turned deliberately away from the lawyer, and with the manly instinct of one who knows his own rights, appealed to the presiding judge.

"If I understand aright, your honour, I have been called here to state what I know of the mode of life of the prisoners at the bar, and not my own experiences. If you command me to give an explanation of my motives and actions, sir, I shall do my best to obey orders; but otherwise I should prefer to be excused from answering questions which I deny any man's right to ask."

A murmur of approbation succeeded this assertion of independence.

"Mr. Trump," remarked the judge, in reply, "I think the witness justified in his objection to your question. After what we have heard and witnessed, any further discussion of his identity is trivial. If you propose to sift his private character, an opportunity for that may arise later in the trial. For the present, I rule that the attorney for the prosecution be permitted to resume his examination."

"Though I trust I shall not be guilty of putting my questions in so offensive a form as that my legal brother has thought proper to employ," now remarked the Government attorney, "he has to some degree forestalled the very first inquiry which I proposed making. It has appeared in the evidence already before us, Captain Rawle, that your ship was steering considerably off her course when the pirate hove in sight, and that in your pursuit and capture of her you expended an amount of time and zeal inconsistent with your interest as a shipmaster and with those of your owners. By way of satisfying the jury on this point, I trust you have no objection to furnishing such a statement of facts as will be explanatory of your motive and its cause."

"None whatever, sir."

"Your zeal, then, in the detection and arrest of pirates, — to what is that due?"

"To years of bondage, and cruelty, and hard labour,

imposed on me by men of their stamp; to my knowing what it is to be my own master, and what it is to be a slave; to the chains that have eaten my flesh to the bone;" and turning up the sleeve of a rough pea-jacket that he wore, he displayed, just above his wrist, a ghastly groove that encircled it, the effects of a long-corroding wound. "And more than this," he added, replacing his sleeve, and looking down upon his mother with that tender, boyish smile of his, tempered now by the sterner sufferings of his manhood, "more than all, to the home-sickness that has eaten into my heart."

"When and where did you encounter pirates?"

"In the Mediterranean, on my first voyage."

"And you were taken prisoner?"

"All of us, sir. I was before the mast, but that made no difference; officers and men, weak and strong,—they treated us all alike."

"And took you to —?"

"Algiers. For three years I laboured there like a galley-slave, — a delicate lad, passenger in our ship, chained to my arm. We were never once separated, though he sickened and came near dying. We might be there yet, alive or dead, but for Decatur and the rest — God bless 'em!"

A fresh buzz of interest and enthusiasm now circulated through the court-room. There are but few members of a free community, however illiterate, who are wholly ignorant of the historical events of their own day. Our recent successes against the Barbary States, and the deliverance of the unfortunate captives, had everywhere been subjects of familiar talk and discussion, and an individual just rescued by our national prowess from the hated corsair was at once brought into personal and fraternal relations with every American citizen. What with these facts, and the simple manliness with which they were narrated, there was scarcely a person present who would not eagerly have emulated Van Hausen in shaking hands with George, — which, at this crisis, the old man came forward and did over again, with more heartiness, if possible, than before.

"I think we have here a sufficient justification of the motive which took Captain Rawle's ship as many points off her course as the counsel for the accused may prove her to have been," remarked the attorney, with difficulty concealing, under a show of moderation, his triumph in the sensation produced by his witness. "It has been reported that the principal on the indictment, Bullet, learned his trade among the African corsairs; however this may be, his reputation as the king of pirates has been so long established, that Captain Rawle owed him a very natural grudge, and could afford to go out of his way to gratify it."

"I owe no man a grudge," said George, promptly taking up the word in response to this insinuation. "God, who has afflicted me in justice, and delivered me in mercy, forbid! My duty is to Him who has had pity on me, to the country that has rescued me, and to all brave tars whom I had the power, in my turn, to save from such a fate as mine. If there is a man on earth who might well be believed, who has had cause, indeed, to act in this case from personal enmity and revenge — I am that man; but I have acted from no such motive, no such feeling, so help me Heaven!"

There was a solemnity and a fervour in this asseveration for which no one was prepared. It gave dignity and grandeur to what might otherwise have seemed merely an act of retaliation. It gave added weight, too, to the succeeding testimony.

"And your owners," continued the attorney. "You had their licence for your attempt to suppress piracy?"

"The licence was in my instructions. The court will not wonder that my owners fitted out the 'Antelope' so that she could face a pirate, when I state that one of them, a merchant in Surinam, is father of the lad who was my fellow-prisoner, and who all but died of the hardships he had to suffer in Algiers. The vessel, too, which was captured, together with ourselves, was mostly the property of their firm. If the owners had had no other reason for putting me in master of the 'Antelope,' I think it would have been enough that they

knew if a chance came for bearing down on any craft that sailed under the black flag, it was a duty I'd never turn my back on."

This answer was so satisfactory, the evidence on this point so conclusive, that the attorney now turned his attention to testimony that bore directly against the accused. It was given throughout in that graphic, laconic style peculiar to men of active occupation and simple character; here and there a sea phrase, or a rustic allusion marked the witness as a man whose education had been that of deep and stirring events and experiences, rather than of the schools of learning; but so intelligent was George's narrative, so unpretending in its conciseness, that it confirmed all the proof that had gone before, and so far as it went, carried with it conviction.

But after all, there was a deficiency in the evidence; two essential links were wanting. The attorney unfortunately had boasted early in the day of more than one point which he had no means of proving, and the opposing counsel did not forget to put him to the test.

"Captain Rawle," said the latter, an opportunity being given him at last to resume his cross-questioning, "supposing we grant all the crimes imputed to the pirate Bullet by the foregoing witnesses, can you swear, on your own knowledge, that the prisoner at the bar is that man?"

"I can only state my belief."

"I do not ask what you *believe*, but what you *know*."

"I cannot then."

"Ah!" with an ironical emphasis, then resuming an interrogatory tone, "supposing it proved that the vessel commanded by the aforesaid Bullet was a pirate ship, and fitted out accordingly, can you swear that the vessel whose destruction you witnessed was his vessel?"

"I cannot."

"Ah!" again.

And here there was an ominous pause. A loophole was evidently opening by which these dreaded criminals might

escape, after all. Everybody looked counfounded; a deep gloom and apprehension began to settle upon the audience.

"Is your evidence all in?" inquired the judge of the prosecuting attorney.

The latter fumbled his papers nervously, whispered with his colleague, hesitated, and then said he believed that it was.

"And yours?" to the prisoner's counsel.

"We have none to bring forward, your honour. The nature of the case forbids it to my unfortunate clients, — dragged hither from a foreign clime, and compelled to take their chance of a trial in the midst of a prejudiced community, and destitute of the support and countenance of their compatriots and friends. Fortunately, your honour, they require no such extraneous aid. The incompleteness and fallacy of the testimony brought forward against them is a sufficient refutation of the indictment. I do not need to expend much strength on this occasion; the weakness of my opponent is my guarantee, and will, I am confident, ensure a verdict of acquittal from this intelligent jury, so soon as I am permitted to make a fair statement of the case."

These were mere words of course, but Trump's air of security and self-confidence indicated a reserved force by means of which, knowing his adversary's weak points, he would by-and-by effectually undermine him; and when the experienced counsellor who was to address the jury on behalf of the prosecution rose to commence his task, if he did not tremble, everybody trembled for him.

But before he had uttered a syllable, when he had just raised his right arm to enforce the opening phrases of his argument, the attorney at his side gave a start of surprise, and arrested the gesture of his colleague, as seizing him by the arm he exclaimed, "By the Lord Harry, here comes Bly! They're bringing him in just in time! We're all right now!" and the attorney rubbed his hands, and actually chuckled with glee.

It was true. Bly, too feeble to walk, was at this moment

brought in on a straw mattress, hastily mounted on one of the narrow prison doors. He was stretched at full length, and lay so stiff and helpless as to prove a dead weight to his carriers. His features, too, were so pinched, his lips so unnaturally compressed, the whole face so colourless, that those who were in the way of his entrance moved aside with involuntary awe to permit the passage, as they believed, of a corpse. Only the attorney, who had seen him look just so in the prison, could have hoped to wring living testimony from this human clod; only one who was a sharer in the secrets of which he kept the key, could have feared the unlocking of those lips. As it was, the attorney experienced an exultant thrill, while that other, who from her vantage post at the front of the gallery overlooked the scene that was enacting below, felt all the suspense, the horror, the dread that had haunted her heart for years, concentrated into one moment's agony. Yes, worse, a thousand times worse than her utmost fear had conjured up was this moment realized; for the accuser and the accused were met, face to face. The grave had given up its dead; but what power now could avert the judgment?

When suspense, the suspense of years, has culminated; when the crisis is reached, and the final blow aimed, the soul does not at once recoil; it stands upright; it braces itself for the charge, and meets the shock with the firmness that desperation gives. How Angie looked, or what she endured at this moment, it is not for you, nor me, nor herself, ever to know. It is enough that she was neither stunned, nor crazed, nor stupefied; that, noiseless, motionless, breathless, with an intensity of all her powers, which crowded years of common life into that awful moment, she watched and waited for the end.

At a sign from the attorney, George had stepped down from the witness-stand, and taking a position just opposite, stood leaning against the dock. He had vacated his former post to make way for the stretcher that bore the new witness, which was about to be deposited there. Apparently he had not recognized his old comrade; indeed, he had scarcely

caught sight of him, for the porters, staggering under their load, carried him low, and bent over their burden in such a way as partially to conceal it. Not until Bly, relieved from the agony he had suffered in the process of transportation, opened his eyes and rolled them wildly around him, did George become transfixed by their stare; not until, borrowing strength from the excitement of the occasion, Bly gathered up his limbs and scrambled, like a fallen beast, first to his knees, and then, by the aid of his attendants, to his feet, did George suspect his identity. But then as the face, disfigured by disease and branded by moral scars, was jerked impatiently from one side of the house to the other, and the eyes, at length fastening on their object, glared in his direction as if gloating on their prey, while a scowl of malignant determination darkened the face even more fearfully than before — then he knew him. Meanwhile, in a mechanical, abstracted way, Bly had submitted to the process of being sworn, and the court were prepared to listen to his testimony.

“Well, Bly,” said the prosecuting attorney, with difficulty repressing any other symptoms of his exuberant gratification and triumph than were indicated by a diligent rubbing of his hands, and complacent nodding of his head, “I am glad to see that you have come to give your evidence of crimes that you know more about, I suspect, than any of us. Mind now, my good fellow,” he proceeded, in a cautious, conciliatory tone, “I don’t ask you to commit yourself any more than you can help. I only want you to point out your partners in any transaction you may have been engaged in, and to give a correct account of the affair, so far as they were concerned.”

The jaws, no longer compressed by a resolution of silence, but rigid with suppressed passion, parted at this, quivered, and rattled an instant, as with an ague-fit; then, heavy with the weight of matter that struggled to find vent, came to a dead lock.

“Speak out, my man,” said the watchful attorney, in an encouraging tone, while every ear in the audience was strained to catch words, at the mere suspicion of whose import the air

seemed resonant. The wretched witness was such a living testimonial to crime and its consequences, that proof of it seemed to emanate from his person, and thicken the very atmosphere in which he stood, — or hung helpless, rather, for he was still supported by two gaol officials, who propped him under each shoulder, and so enabled him to maintain an upright posture.

Again he attempted to give utterance to his too eager words. The result was a gurgle — a prolonged stammer — then an exultant, “Ha! ha!” which caused everybody to shrink and shudder, and finally, the first syllables having found voice and exit, a torrent of speech poured itself forth, beginning in stammers and half-articulate phrases, but ending in a storm of invective and accusation, which defied all leading and guidance on the part of the counsel for the prosecution, as well as all interruption from his opponent.

“A-a-a-angels, or de-e-e-vils couldn’t put a bit in my mouth, now!” was his first coherent assertion. “They’ve tried it, both on ’em. I’ve been led by the devil all my life, an’ when Ole Nick, as they call me, turned agin such a hard master, he came in sheep’s clothin’, an’ got the upper hand o’ me agin that way. Yes, he sent an *angel* (this last word was spoken with terrible irony) to find out the soft spot in me, an’ gull me. I believed her, the hussy, an’ promised to keep dark, but I’ve found her out, an’ that’s why I’m here. There’s but one man in this ’ere world that I’d give what’s left o’ my poor life to see kick the bucket, an’ him — him —” here the witness might be seen to clench his fist, and his voice, hitherto so choked by agitation and weakness as to be intelligible to those only who were in his immediate vicinity, gathered strength and volume. “Why, I’d give my neck to the halter any minute if I could fust see him swung off. She told me he was dead already, the lyin’ jade! an’ so I held my tongue, an’ would ha’ let it rot there ’fore I’d spoke; for what did I care about hanging half-a-dozen poor sailors that are no wuss an’ no better than what I’ve been myself. They might ha’ got off fur all me, an’ welcome; but there’s one man here

that it's wuth my while to spend my last breath in blastin'. You want me to pint out my partner in sin, — the head of the bizness, — do yer, sir?" (to the lawyer.) "Wall, then, there he stands!" and raising his finger, the finger of doom, a skeleton finger, like that of Death itself, he aimed it with the precision of fate in the exact direction of the young sea-captain, who but a moment before had, by the manliness of his deportment and testimony, created such a universal predisposition in his favour. George stood upright, and unflinching as a rock, looking Bly full in the face. There was an instant of awful expectation.

"Yes," — continued Bly, poising his head a little on one side, as if better to survey his victim; then looking around upon the audience with greedy satisfaction at the multitude assembled to witness his confession, — "there stands the man that fust dipped my hands in blood, when he murdered, — yes, *he*, not *I* — for he *made* me do it, — when we between us, at any rate, beat out the brains of poor old Baultie Rawle."

Here his words were cut short. Bly had just boasted that no power, whether of angel or demon, could stay him now; but even he, deceived, hardened, implacable as he was, paused and shuddered at the cry that here went ringing and echoing through the house — a woman's cry — the short, sharp cry that comes from heart-strings snapped asunder. The guardian spirit that hears a lost soul — the soul it has watched, tended, prayed for — condemned at the final judgment, could not ring out a more fearful death-knell to hope than that human cry. At the same time two arms were flung convulsively in the air, in the manner of those who have experienced a fatal shot, and a head, still young and glorious with a wealth of wavy hair, sank as if by its own weight upon the breast that still heaved with the cry that had just been wrung from it. The next instant the arms had dropped heavily, and the hands, just raised convulsively towards heaven, were spread as a shield between a pale, horror-

struck face, and a thousand eyes that were instantly turned upon it, — George's among the rest.

The gaping curiosity of the crowd was baffled by the natural screen which had buried the poor face out of sight. But the hair from which the faded hood had fallen, the delicate outline of the hands, the figure half hidden by the old blue mandarin, none of these were needed to render George's recognition of Angie complete and instantaneous. His heart had been no less true in its instincts than her own. The voice that had been the music of his life could not be mistaken, even in its wildest discord. He knew her before he looked up. Was it pity for himself or her which caused his eyes to fall as suddenly as they had been raised, and his back to be turned to her despair, while he once more faced the witness-stand?

Nor was the diversion given to the public eye more than momentary. No secondary object, however implicated in the mysteries about to be revealed, could rival Bly himself, on whose next words the audience hung breathless; and there was no time to be wasted in the indulgence of idle curiosity or speculation, unless they would lose the thread of his testimony. The interruption had checked him for an instant only; he had even managed, by the rapidity with which he returned to the charge, to baffle Trump, who rose with the design of putting an injunction upon testimony which was evidently foreign to the indictment. He was aided, indeed, in this, by the judge, who, perceiving the difficulty with which testimony could on any terms be extracted from a witness so shattered by disease, intimated by a wave of the hand that he must be suffered to tell his story in his own way.

But there was a marked change in his voice and manner as he proceeded. Whether his first outburst of accusation had relieved his overcharged breast; whether he experienced an involuntary awe and terror at having given form and publicity to the crime that had secretly haunted him so long; whether "conscience waked despair that slumbered," or whether there was still a soft spot in his heart which Angie's

cry had reached, certain it is that the man, an instant before so eager and savage for his prey, subsided now into a strain more convincing and condemnatory, because less wildly vindictive. There was even a touch of pathos in the retrospective protest with which he continued.

"Yes, that was the fust. I'd never known the taste o' blood, then; but fur him I never should have to this day, for I hadn't a bad heart. God is my witness," — and here, by a sudden revulsion of feeling, the voice of the wretched criminal shook with the genuine tremblings of remorse — a remorse that threatened next to explode into the sobs of a penitent, — "God is my witness, that the face, the voice, the white hairs of that old man have haunted me night an' day ever since, an' driven me desp'rate. Things as bad, or wuss, came arterwards. I saw 'em done, if I didn't have a hand in 'em; but nothin' like that to me — no, nothin' like that — stand aside, Geordie Rawle! stand aside, my man; yer honest face looks too much like that o' yer dead uncle's — it blinds my eyes;" and he drew the back of his hand across the sunken orbs; "besides, you were never made to screen a villain, leastways this one!"

Thus admonished, George stepped aside, bewildered by the terrible revelations of the moment, and tenderly supporting his mother, who, an instant before, simultaneously with Angie's cry, without warning, without apparent motive, had rushed towards him with outspread arms and enfolded him, so far as might be, in the miniature shelter of her embrace.

Shelter from what? some phantom of her imagination only. George was guiltless of every fault but that of intercepting Bly's line of vision, and, as he stood leaning against the dock, partially hiding the true object of his accusation.

"That's right, Mr. George; now I have him, face to face;" and Bly, easing himself from the oblique position in which his head had hitherto been inclined, gazed straight at the chief of the piratical gang, now more fully exposed to his view; "I've told the fust; listen now, all on yer, while I

call this man to answer fur some o' the other black deeds he's fathered, under one name or another. I don't care what high-sounding title he's borrowd or stolen fur this occasion; it's all the same whether you call Him Hebrew Bullet, the Black Bull o' the Indies, Cap'n Josselyn of his Majesty's Roy'l Navy, or the very Evil One himself."

The audacious villain thus designated and presented to the audience, here rose with as much assurance and complacency as a man might assume upon an honorary introduction to an assembly (he had been seated until now, and his insignificant stature had helped to secure him from observation), and surveyed the jury and the legal circle in front of him, a supercilious expression curling his lip, and his figure poised with a braggart air. Then settling his shirt-collar (he was dressed to a point) and adjusting a foppish eye-glass to his eye, he turned himself in the dock, and looked leisurely around the house.

Angie still stood in her central position, her hands fallen from her face, her lips parted, her eyes strained wide open, her features and attitude indicative of nothing comprehensible to the observer; it might have been anguish, fear, amazement, which so disturbed and petrified her, — it simply looked like vacancy. Recognizing her, — finding in her possibly the object of his search, — Bullet smiled an icy smile, saluted her familiarly, and pressed his hand to his heart, as if in acknowledgment of her recent expression of interest in his fate.

The crowd, slow to believe in such cold-blooded effrontery, watched him in silence an instant, then a storm of hisses burst from every lip, and the constables hastily interfered, compelling Bullet to re-seat himself, and a second time proceeding to enforce order in the house. Probably the girl, who had been thus signalled out and again made conspicuous, sank down mechanically when the rest of the audience subsided into quiet. She had met the salutation of Bullet and the stare of the multitude with an unmoved countenance, as if quite unconscious of the attention which was

concentrated upon her; few could catch sight of her face after she had resumed a kneeling attitude, and the attention of those few was but superficial. A watchful eye might have discerned, however, even in the dim twilight that was by this time creeping over the court-room, that as she knelt there, with clasped hands and uplifted gaze, the stony lines on her face gradually melted into a rapturous and triumphant smile, her eye shone with an almost unearthly light, her countenance was like that of one transfigured. It was an ecstasy of joy, the reaction after despair, and scarcely less appalling in view of possible consequences. But, as I have said, no one noticed all this, not even Hannah, who sat close beside her, excited, suspicious, and not a little wrathful at her own inability to hear and comprehend what was going on, and at Angie's unaccountable behaviour and apparent indifference to her privations.

The shameless audacity with which Bullet had met the charges of Bly, displayed the more hardihood, inasmuch as a few moments ago he and his comrades might reasonably have hoped for an acquittal, while now the evidence was bearing down upon them with such overwhelming force as to blanch the cheeks and send a quiver through the frames of his accomplices. For a few moments, indeed, the most sanguine of the indignant crowd, and especially the prosecuting attorney, had reason to tremble lest the torrent of condemning testimony was about to be intercepted and stayed, for Bly, exhausted by the vehemence with which he had charged home to Bullet the crime which lay heaviest on his own conscience, swooned, and there seemed for a time little hope of his revival. But by cautious treatment and the aid of stimulants, he was at length so far restored as to be able to proceed with his revelations of the past. These covered a period of four years, dating from the time succeeding the murder of Baultie Rawle, — when, a fugitive from justice, nothing remained for Bly but to connect himself with Bullet's gang, and set sail with them on what proved a piratical cruise, — up to a period of desperate resolve, when, weakened by disease, but maddened

by tyranny, he had succeeded in effecting an escape from the master-spirit who had hitherto bound him, soul and body, to his iron will.

And now the Government attorney had an opportunity, and he improved it well, of exhibiting his skill in managing a witness. With delicate discrimination and masterly tactics he so controlled and led the erratic mind of Bly, as to keep him within the bounds of legal decorum, limit his confessions to the charges contained in the indictment, and, more than all, evade the interruptions and escape the legal injunctions of Trump, who spared no effort to frighten, bully, or confuse the witness, whose every word was as a thread in the rope that was to prove a fatal noose to his clients.

Thus guided and guarded, Bly gave his testimony with less spirit and originality than at the commencement of the examination, when his precarious condition and overmastering excitement either pleaded his excuse, or claimed the indulgence of the court. Thus detailed and sifted, however, his confessions proved enough, and far more than enough, to implicate all the prisoners at the bar, and especially their leader, in every charge set forth in the indictment; the crimes imputed to them by the consul and supercargo were established beyond question, and their identity and that of their ship so certified to, that the nature and unanimity of the verdict was placed beyond question.

Once only did Bly escape the watchfulness of his guardians, and bursting all legal bounds, strike boldly at the doors, so long shut upon that crime which evidently lay nearest his conscience. His attention, for some time distracted from the matter in hand, had at length become fixed on a cringing figure, which, creeping nearer and nearer to the witness stand, stood at last with neck bent forward and head a little inclined, greedily, and yet cautiously, drinking in the evidence. "I see yer — yer old wolf!" howled Bly at last, shaking his head at this individual, with a singular gesture of recognition. "How comes on that tavern o' your'n, where all the mischief in the Jarseys is hatched? And where's your

ugly cub, that drunken Pete, that was the go-between in the pooty piece o' business I've jest blown on? Why ain't he here to help me out with my story? What did he say when he heerd the end his old uncle had come ter — heh?"

All eyes followed the direction of Bly's, but to no purpose; for by this time the wretched father had slunk away, and hid his tell-tale face in the human thicket of the crowd.

Then, with a grin of satisfaction at the effect of his innuendoes, Bly submitted to a reprimand from the court, and proceeded with the revolting task, not yet completed, of perfecting his development of crime.

The short winter's day had drawn to a close before the evidence was all in. The lamps that were lighted for the benefit of those immediately engaged in the trial cast but a feeble glimmer around one end of the court-room, and left the remainder in deep gloom. The gathering shades of night seemed to foreshadow the darkness of death which was closing in upon the prisoners. As Bly was removed from the witness stand, a pause succeeded: the hush that hung over the assembly was ominous. It was in itself a verdict.

It was now the duty of the senior counsel for the prosecution to address the jury. He claimed their attention, however, for a few moments only; his advantage in the case was too palpable, too solemn, to gain anything from oratory, and he prudently waived any other argument than that of the facts to which they had just listened. Trump was almost immediately therefore called to his task of arguing the defence, — so hopeless a task, so impossible a defence, that it would surely have been stigmatized in the annals of the bar as "Trump's great failure;" but that he wisely imitated the example of his opponent, and after a brief harangue to the jury, couched in vague terms of compliment and caution, left his cause, as he said, "to the decision of a body of his fellow-citizens, in whose unbiassed judgment he was no less willing than his learned brother to confide."

Thereupon the judge, briefly but gravely, summed up the evidence. The jury, without leaving their seats, pronounced

the anticipated verdict, — “Guilty.” The prisoners were then remanded to gaol, with orders to appear the following morning to receive their sentence; and the court adjourned.

One act of brutality was yet wanting to fill up the measure of Bullet's crimes. As they conducted him back to prison, and when just outside the court-room door the excited throng was pressing hotly on his path, a woman, one who had all day been flitting like a phantom around and within the court-room, an emaciated, haggard woman, the veriest outcast of the crowd, pierced by frantic efforts to the front, and moved by the power of a love stronger than death — stronger than sin, of which death is but the offspring — tried to fling herself upon his breast. But he drew back with a motion of disgust and scorn, which baffled her intention. With imploring gesture she now held up to his gaze a child, which hung wilting at her breast, — a child some four years old, perhaps, — an infant in size, though with the withered face of age; a wretched thing, perishing inch by inch of privation and disease, but with eyes the very image of his on whom they were fastened in mournful appeal, — wine-coloured, blood-tinted eyes — awful in their piteous glare. With a fiendish laugh of recognition and mockery, the cruel father hissed blasting words at the child, — words at which the woman stood rooted and aghast. And then, because she so stood an obstacle in his path, and even the constables, appalled and confounded, forbore to remove her, he raised his foot (his hands it will be remembered were shackled by handcuffs), and — the indignant crowd gave a simultaneous yell of expostulation — but he did it — he kicked her! The sharp edge of his polished boot inflicted only a slight grazing wound, but it was a deeper pain than that which drew from her stung heart a piercing cry, and caused her to clutch the child closer to her bosom, as if it too had shared the blow. The cry of the down-trodden creature was lost in that of the outraged crowd, whom it by this time required the full constabulary force that constituted the escort to restrain from taking the law into their own hands; and while the tumult was at its height, the

figures of mother and child, wasted shadows that they were, melted into the throng, and were lost, — more hopelessly lost even than before.

“Doubtless,” said the “Morning Chronicle” of the next day, in reference to the circumstance above related, “this poor abandoned creature was the same woman whose cry of anguish interrupted the proceedings at the trial, and thrilled the heart of every listener. We are also informed,” added the “Chronicle,” “that the attorney for the prosecution ascribes to the agency of this woman some tampering with one of his principal witnesses, upon whom she succeeded in imposing a vow of silence, which, had it been persevered in, would materially have thwarted the ends of justice. How or when this poor wanderer, generally known as Mad Moll, contrived to obtain communication with the witness, himself a prisoner, no one can conjecture; but what will not the insane devotion of woman often attempt and accomplish for the sake of the wretch who has betrayed her to her ruin!”

The reporter for the “Chronicle” was but a superficial observer of the minor features of the trial. So it must be confessed was the attorney, who, preoccupied with his own arduous duties, failed to observe that the female whose cry of distress in the court-room attracted his eye for an instant only, was identical with the girl whom he had seen, or more probably overlooked, in the gaol.

It was a reasonable mystery, a natural complication, which thus confounded Angie with Polly Stein, or rather, left the former out of the case altogether, except in the minds of the parties immediately concerned.

For who could have dreamed that the one tragedy, which was the foremost topic of the day, had involved within it experiences scarcely less deep, real, and far-reaching in their significance, or that the unravelling of one thread of destiny had released another from its strange entanglement?

CHAPTER XXVI.

Supper at "The Pipe and Bowl."

THE crowd had poured out of the City Hall, the tramp of feet and the echo of voices had died away, a solitary figure was moving about the court-room putting out the lamps, and dust and smoke, added to darkness, obscured the atmosphere, when two men groped their way up the staircase leading to the gallery, and the next moment a hand was laid on Hannah Rawle's shoulder, and a strong voice, so shaken with emotion as to be subdued and husky, exclaimed "Aunt Hannah!"

"Lud a massy! Geordie, is that you?" cried the old woman. "Give me your hand, my boy. I can't hear yer, nor see yer, nor git my wits together to make out what all this means. 'Tis you, ain't it?" she added, as George shook hands with her heartily, and supporting her under one elbow, assisted her efforts to rise. "That's right, help me up! I'm een-a-most cramped to death in this place, an' I can't git out nuther. Angie won't stir. Start along, child! it's Geordie come to look us up, — an' Dick, — that's my brother Dick with yer, ain't it? Patience alive! she won't budge; I've been a shakin' an' pushin' of her till I'm tired;" and here one could just see in the dim light that Hannah gave Angie a final pull and nudge, and that both were wholly without effect upon the motionless object that intercepted her exit from the narrow quarters in which she had been imprisoned ever since morning.

An exclamation of anxiety burst from George; he was already bending down to get a closer view of the inanimate figure at his feet.

"Don't! take care! let me!" he exclaimed, barring further action on Hannah's part by an arm that met hers just as it was impatiently advanced for another thrust.

"Fust, as crazy as a loon, an' then, jest dumb-founded! That's been the way she's gone on, an' not a word have I been

able to get out of her. Why, I don't know a thing that's been a happenin' the whole o' this blessed day, except what I've seen with my own eyes!" cried Hannah, angrily. "Law, Geordie, to think you ain't dead, nor nothin', arter all!" she continued, in quite a contrary tone; "an' you look better'n ever you did in yer life. I knew yer the fust minute; I should ha' known yer in Jericho. Fur massy's sake, where did yer come from? Wal, now," resuming her former bitterness of tone, as she observed how wholly George's attention was distracted from her, "what's to pay wi' that gal, I wonder!"

"Angie!" George was saying in the cautious tone in which he might have addressed a sleeper, whom he was hesitating whether or not to wake.

No answer.

"Angie!" again; this time in an earnest, anxious voice.

Still no answer.

Then he attempted to raise her, at first awkwardly, and with diffidence; but finding that her form was rigid, and that she made no resistance, he caught her up in his strong arms as easily and firmly as if she had been an infant, turned, and without a word to his companions, hastened with her up the steps of the gallery and down the staircase. Only his own heart could hear him mutter, "Good God! 'twas more than she could bear. She's dead, and I've done it."

Van Hausen drew back to let them pass. He was not much concerned for Angie. He was only wondering at George's care for her. "If I was in his place, now," he was saying to himself, "I'd leave her for somebody else to look arter, if she *was* in a dead faint. Sarves her right to see the infarnal scamp sent to the gallers, where he belongs! So much fur jiltin' an honest feller for the sake o' sich varmin' (for Van Hausen as well as George had mistaken the true cause of Angie's emotion). "But the Lord has righted both on 'em," muttered the old man; "given back our own boy to be the joy of our old age, an' given the devil his due inter the bargain. We didn't come here fur nothin', did we old ooman?"

he continued in a congratulatory tone to Hannah, who had by this time mounted the steps unassisted, and who, under Van Hausen's guidance, was now following in the footsteps of her nephew, but at a considerable distance, for George, without waiting for his companions, had already gained the outer door of the building, just within which he had left his mother under the charge of the ubiquitous constable. He did not pause even to respond to the anxious expression of Margery's face, or to the constable's blunt inquiries and officious readiness to relieve him of at least a share of his burden; he merely signed to the latter to open the door for him, beckoned to his mother to follow, and without checking his pace, hastened down the steps, across the Park, and into a narrow side street, Margery literally trotting at his elbow — for so only could she keep up with him — and consequently too breathless to utter either a question or a remonstrance. Fortunately, Van Hausen and George had already agreed upon the tavern where Dick had left his horse as the rendezvous for their party, so he and Hannah were able to pursue their course and their dialogue at leisure.

The first contact with the fresh air brought relief to George's fears, for it sent a convulsive shiver through Angie's frame, which was succeeded by similar spasms recurring at intervals, and indicating that life still flowed in a full tide, — a tide interrupted in its ordinary channels, out of course and threatening, but less to be dreaded than the deathly torpor which seemed to have settled upon her. Each of these thrills, electric in its effect, sent a quiver of joy and thankfulness through George's heart, but almost unmanned him too, so that he no longer carried Angie lightly and easily, but trembled beneath her weight. Doubtless, rapid motion and fresh air were as wholesome remedies as could have been employed in her case, for soon she gasped, her breast heaved with one short convulsive breath, and she opened her eyes — glassy, unnatural eyes — which stared unmeaningly up at George, who, for the first time checking his pace, was pausing an instant at a street corner, partly to make sure of his

course, partly to get one look at her by the aid of the light that here glimmered feebly from a lamp-post.

"Angie, don't you know me?" he now cried, with passionate vehemence, for he was frightened at the wild expression of her eyes.

At this she laughed full in his face, and he, poor fellow, who had never heard such a laugh before, stood aghast, with an anguish and despair pictured on his features which all his years of martyrdom had never once reflected there. "Worse than dead! gone mad!" was his thought, "and I've done it!" It was a wonder that he did not drop her upon the side-walk, so terribly did he recoil from what he felt to be his work. But after the first shock he did what in his self-respect and reverence for her he had not dared to do before, he clasped her tightly to his heart — his generous heart, which accepted in its ruin what had repulsed him in its pride; his loyal heart, which vowed fresh allegiance to its shattered idol, and ran on faster than before.

"What's all this! what's all this! somebody sick, or somebody froze, or what?" cried the stout landlady of "The Pipe and Bowl," as George, with Angie in his arms, dashed unceremoniously into her kitchen.

George's reply consisted in depositing Angie in a straight-backed chair, in front of a magnificent fire of hickory logs, and then glancing from her to the landlady with a face of hopeless dismay.

"That's no way!" exclaimed the good woman thus appealed to; "if she's froze, take her as far as you can from the fire; if she's faint, lay her flat, — or here, put her on my bed, and I'll soon bring her to." And the landlady, drawing aside the heavy Killeminster curtains of an old-fashioned Dutch bedstead that stood in one corner of her kitchen, gave a notable slap to the patchwork quilt, and another to the checked pillow-case, which seemed to say — "Put her right down here, and so, young man; and then *I'll* see to her."

It was done; and with the same readiness and zeal with which she would have plucked a chicken, the landlady untied

the hood which hung to the back of Angie's neck, unfastened and removed her mandarin, and commenced an energetic rubbing of her hands and wrists. Angie meanwhile had manifested no other symptom of life than an occasional heaving of the chest; and a sound, something between a breath and a sob. Under the landlady's treatment, she further revived, and there was an immediate recurrence of the symptoms which had so alarmed George, — especially the maniacal laugh.

He groaned.

"O you, hush!" interposed the landlady, authoritatively. "Didn't you ever see anybody this way 'afore? I have, a dozen times."

"Have you?" exclaimed George, looking greatly relieved, though still anxious and woe-begone.

Margery had by this time arrived, panting. She had fallen off a little in her pace at the last, but was near enough to catch George's signal to her as he darted through the tavern door. She had hardly entered the room before she, too, became the subject of the landlady's remonstrances. Squeezed into a little corner at the head of the bed, she was hovering over the patient, patting her cheek and uttering low consolatory syllables, — intensely sympathetic in their tone, and of course the worst possible thing in the world for the already over-excited girl.

"Come now, Goody," said the landlady, "don't you see you're only makin' matters worse? Her narves are all unstrung; a stranger'll manage with her better'n her own folks. You go 'way out o' sight," to Margery; "and you, too," to George; and having waived them both away, she proceeded to rub Angie's hands and feet, chafe her temples, and otherwise endeavour to restore a natural circulation to her system. Convulsive spasms still continued to agitate the poor girl's frame, however, and now a sob, now a laugh, and now a combination of both, to escape from her in spite of the landlady's labours and her own efforts at self-mastery, when a better physician and a stronger will came to their aid in the form of Hannah, who had by this time appeared upon the scene. Her

stern remonstrance, her arbitrary command, had for years been the familiar antidote to every mental and bodily weakness in the household where she bore sway; and her "Hush, now! be still, child! art'st thou ashamed of yourself? Either laugh or cry, an' be done with it!" served at once to infuse tone and vigour into the muscles and nerves enfeebled or paralyzed by successive shocks.

It seemed for a few moments as if the poor girl would strangle in the efforts she made to control the spasms; but she did control them. She looked up gratefully at the kind landlady, who was sprinkling water in her face, and instinctively clung to her hand. Hannah, satisfied with the wholesome effect of her reprimand, retired to the other end of the room, and stood gazing into the fire. Van Hausen, meanwhile, had beckoned to George from the doorway, and the two had gone off together. Margery, silent, patient, humble as ever, in spite of the joy and deliverance wrought out for her this day, sat in the corner to which the landlady had motioned her when she banished her from Angie's bedside. The stillness of the room (for, except that her breath came quick and hard, Angie was quiet now), the warmth, the cheerful, flickering blaze of the fire, the recollections of the past, the revelations of the present, all were telling upon Hannah with subduing effect. She was in need of gentle, genial influences, for there was war and contradiction in her heart, — a heart that had been seared and hardened by the strife of human passions, and the thirst of blood for blood. That thirst was past, that glut satisfied, for during the walk to the tavern she had learned from her brother the developments and result of the trial which she had witnessed, but had been far from comprehending. Stern triumph had shone in her eyes as she entered the tavern, — an unqualified triumph, that could not endure the display of any less exultant emotion, as was witnessed in her rebuke to Angie's weakness and prostration of nerve. But as she stood now, in the stillness, watching the flames curl round the logs, something must have stolen into her soul and modified its vindictive

exultation, for the dry light in her eye gradually became moist, the unnatural strength in her limbs slackened; she looked around in search of a chair that stood behind her, sank into it, suffered her head to droop forward until her chin rested on her hands, and more than once drew the worsted mitten, that trophy and pledge of the past, from her pocket, gazed at it thoughtfully, and replaced it meditatively.

Perhaps, as she pondered the events of the day, she was reflecting how little part she herself had borne in them, — she, a deaf old woman, who could not even hear the evidence to which strangers' ears were privy. And her cherished bit of proof, to which she had clung with such faith and hope — of what value had it been, after all? Even now the chief agent in planning her husband's murder was to die in expiation of other crimes committed against high Heaven, not in revenge for *her* wrong; and the wretched man that had dealt the fatal blow was a destined victim of disease, not of the scaffold. Humbling thoughts, these.

And how different an instrument Providence had chosen for the accomplishment of His retribution, from any that her forethought or wisdom could have conceived! Perhaps, as her mind returned from groping among the mysteries of crime and its judgments, to dwell upon George's unlooked-for return, and the signal part he had played in the arrest and conviction of the villain who had plotted his uncle's murder, her hard, vindictive heart was awed and melted before the power and love of Him whose justice had thus walked hand in hand with His mercy.

Some such humiliating, subduing influences must have proved the result and crisis of her meditation, for turning herself at length in Margery's direction, and hitching her own chair a little to one side, she exclaimed, sympathetically, "Don't set off there shiverin', Margery; draw up, woman. I'm keepin' the fire off yer!" and when Margery, like one roused from some dream or trance, had obeyed the invitation, and the two old women were ranged side by side in front of the blazing logs, Hannah still further evidenced her sympathy

and congratulation by laying her hand expressively on Margery's knee, — not an empty hand, for it held an open snuff-box.

Margery gratefully accepted this little attention.

"So you've got yer boy back, Margery," said Hannah, as she herself took a pinch also.

Margery nodded, and snuffed in silent assent.

"The Lord's been very marciful to yer this day — to us all," continued Hannah, after a pause.

Again Margery assented by a motion of the head — a reverential motion — more significant than words could have been, even if Hannah had had ears for the latter.

"Blessed be His name!" said Hannah.

And Margery, by a gesture, said "Amen."

"She's asleep, ain't she?" now asked Hannah, checking the landlady who was crossing the room on tiptoe, and pointing to the bed where Angie lay, with closed eyes and hands devoutly clasped upon her breast.

The landlady gave an affirmative nod, and glanced at her patient with an air of satisfaction.

"I'm glad on't; it's the best thing in the world fur her. Poor gal! she ain't one o' the kind that breaks down fur nothin'. But she's had a hard time on't to-day; we have all on us."

The landlady, all curiosity, was eager to hear more, — to listen indeed to a detailed account of her guests' experiences; but Hannah, even in ordinary matters, was no gossip, and the landlady, disconcerted by the reserve and the deafness of the old woman, was obliged to content herself with the assurance that they had been in court all day, had eaten nothing since morning, and hoped she would give them something comfortable for supper.

This latter hint, a most acceptable one to the landlady, gave an instant diversion to her faculties, both bodily and mental. "The Pipe and Bowl," a genuine Dutch tavern, which had attained to the height of its reputation in the old colonial days, had long since been superseded by statelier

places of entertainment, highbrick structures, in some instances foreshadowing our modern hotels. On market days "The Pipe and Bowl" was still much frequented by rustic customers, and it was seldom that its early dinner was not attended by a few Dutch farmers or tradesfolk, who flattered the landlady and kept alive the reputation of her modest inn by their encomiums of her sourkrout and hog's-head cheese; but "The Pipe and Bowl" had, for the most part, degenerated into a convenient tap-room and eating-house, and it was seldom that a party of guests, a private party, females included, called for a meal there after sun-down. So Hannah's hint at once suggested the swinging of the tea-kettle across the crane and adjusting it over the blaze, and an examination and stirring of the contents of a huge pot already boiling alongside, the setting out of an oaken table, and various rummagings in press and pantry.

"For massy's sake, Margery," exclaimed Hannah, abruptly, while the landlady was absent from the kitchen on one of these hospitable errands, "while she's out, tell me how yer came here. We left yer at home this mornin', an', I vum, I believe you rode to York on a broom-stick. 'Twouldn't be a bit stranger than the way I saw yer brought inter the courthouse."

Margery told her story in her own way — or rather in the only way that it could be made intelligible to Hannah, — that is, by signs, hints, and broken phrases, which together furnished an outline of her adventures; but for the reader's convenience, I will tell it in a more connected manner.

An embargo being put upon Captain Rawle's liberty from the first moment of his arrival in port, in consequence of his detention as a witness, he had lost no time in despatching a message of report and inquiry to his home at Stein's Plains. A couple of his sailors, with sailors' alacrity to improve the earliest opportunity for an excursion by land, and with the eagerness which hands educated only for pulling ropes, always manifest to grasp the reins, were only too eager for a

sleighing frolic. Starting early in the morning and comparatively sober, these jolly tars had long before noon reported to the astonished ears of Margery the intelligence they were sent to convey — viz., the safety of her son — his arrival in port — his unlucky detention by legal authorities. The poor mother, less elated at his seeming resurrection from the dead than horror-struck at learning that he was already in the clutches of the law, had but one question to ask, "Where is he? where is my boy?" and but one entreaty, which she poured out almost on her knees, "Oh, take me to him, good sailors! For the love of Heaven, take me to my boy!"

The good-hearted fellows, by this time glowing with a glass of grog they each drunk at Stein's, where they had stopped to inquire the way, were ripe for executing the will of the first applicant; moreover, did a sailor ever turn a deaf ear to a woman's prayer — a mother's? She started — (poor, mad Margery — for fear had by this time unsettled her faculties) most imperfectly protected against the weather, but they wrapped her up warm in the buffalo robes, for which they had not before quite discovered a use, and in spite of their recklessness and continual mistakes concerning the route, their frequently stopping to procure drink, — which once or twice they, with the best intentions in the world, insisted upon the old woman's sharing, — and, above all, their many hairbreadth escapes from sudden upset and utter demolition, they reached the city in safety, drove with an air of authority to the very door of the City Hall, where they understood the trial was going forward, and mounting the old woman upon their shoulders, bore her triumphantly through the crowd and deposited her, as we have seen, in the very arms of her son.

"What are you about, my dearie?" questioned the landlady as, coming back, when her other labours were completed, to look after her charge, she found Angie awake and making an effort to rise.

"I'm better now," said Angie, in the feeble, tremulous

tone of one greatly exhausted. "I don't think it'll come again. I'll get up now."

"You've been asleep, dearie, and you're a sight the better for't, I daresay; but I wouldn't stir yet — lie still awhile till you feel stronger."

"No; I'll sit up now," persisted Angie, with quiet decision; and sliding off from the high bed, she took a step forward, but she had overcalculated her strength; she staggered, and would have fallen, but her watchful nurse caught her and supported her to a seat.

"She's dizzy with just waking up, that's all!" commented the landlady, in a side tone intended for Hannah and Margery.

Angie sank into the first chair that offered itself, with a faint smile which seemed to say — "Oh, I'm better; I shall do very well now!" The smile was meant for Margery, who had crept to her side, and was gazing down upon her with a glance full of tender meaning. The old, and the young hands, too, that had met so often and so stealthily in mutual terror, sympathy, and dread, were secretly clasped once more — this time in unspeakable joy.

Angie, though she did not think it worth while to contradict the landlady's assertion, had not been asleep, nor, since she was first revived by the open air of the street, wholly unconscious — though utterly unable to control the purely physical effects of the terrible excitement she had undergone. For the last half hour she had lain in that repose of utter exhaustion which resembles sleep, and is scarcely less refreshing.

The landlady, observing the hissing and sputtering of her tea-kettle, bustled off, as she said, "to set the tea to steepin' for the common good." Angie, her face wan and colourless, and rendered more so, apparently, by the background of dark rippling hair which had been pushed back in a heavy mass from her forehead to relieve her throbbing temples, sat with her hand riveted to that of Margery, and her head almost resting on the shoulder of the old woman, who was bending

fondly over her, for the first time in their mutual experience, the least helpless of the two, when a door close by, which led directly from the kitchen to the stable-yard, opened, and Van Hausen, followed by George, entered abruptly.

The former, without looking to right or left, walked directly to the fireplace, and taking the chair which Margery had vacated, gave a complacent glance at the preparations for supper which were going forward there. The latter, equally fixed in his purpose, saw nothing but Angie's pale face, and stepping cautiously up behind his mother, whispered eagerly, as he laid a hand on Margery's shoulder, "She's better, isn't she? She's got over it? — thank Heaven!"

Angie started at hearing his voice so near her; so did Margery. The former lifted up her drooping head; instinctively they both unclasped the tightly-locked hands, — as if he could detect all — all that was understood between them in that clasp. That was impossible. How could he conceive of the nature and extent of the unspoken confidence that had existed between these two for years — the terrible dread — the mighty deliverance? All that he saw — and they did not disengage themselves from each other so quickly but that he *did* see that — was the evidence of a love as tender and instinctive as that of a mother and child.

"Yes, George, I'm — I'm — you —" the effort was too much for Angie; her lip quivered; he started forward, and was about to snatch the hand his mother had relinquished, when something came between him and his intention.

It was only a cup of tea in the hand of the landlady, — not an insuperable obstacle certainly, but the exhortation which accompanied it proved so.

"Let her alone now, sweetheart!" exclaimed the landlady, inserting her buxom person between them. "Don't you say a word to her till she's had something to stay her stomach;" and the good woman, who was possessed with the idea that a misunderstanding with the young man, and nothing else, had been the cause of the young woman's

distress, still further balked his intention by the threatening whisper with which she added, "If you speak one word now, you'll bring another attack o' the spasms on her, as sure as the world! Your supper's on the table; you must be mighty hungry, all of you, so you set to while I get somethin' warm into her."

George, thus frustrated and overborne, was compelled to beat an awkward retreat. A wistful look on his part, a timid one on Angie's, were stolen rather than exchanged; and thus, after five years of separation and all the misery that had intervened, this, their first broken interview, ended in mutual disappointment, embarrassment, and constraint.

There was a marked contrast in the appetites of the parties who sat down to the landlady's bountiful supper. Van Hausen ate voraciously — the exciting events of the day had but served to whet his gastronomic powers. Hannah, whose still sturdy frame demanded regular nourishment, and whose bodily and mental constitution were of that tough fibre which no accidents of fate or fortune could disturb in the exercise of their natural functions, "set to," as the landlady had recommended, and seemed in a fair way to compensate herself for a long fast. But Margery did no such justice to the hospitalities of "The Pipe and Bowl." It was sustenance enough for the mother, soul and body, that her eyes were feasting on her son; and George, whether elated by the fulfilment of his heart's best prophecies, or agitated by something worse than its fears; whether satiated already with good cheer, and inwardly saying grace, or choked with a similar emotion to that which made Angie, sitting in her dark corner, discourage the good landlady's attempt to put a little life into her in the form of poached eggs and mutton broth, was, at all events, unsuccessful in his attempts to even feign an appetite. At last, suddenly pushing back his plate, and starting up, he exclaimed, in reply to the questioning looks of his companions, especially of Van Hausen, who was as yet but half satisfied, "Keep on eating, uncle Dick" (so he had called him from a boy); "I'm only going to see if your horse has finished his

oats; because, if he has, I may as well help that little shaver in the stable about harnessing."

The supper-table was pushed back against the wall, and the two old women, with their cloaks on, — Margery with a thick one of the landlady's outside her own, — were getting a last warming in front of the fire, when George and Van Hausen, who had joined him at the stable, drove to the front door of the tavern in the pung.

Angie, who had caught the familiar sound of the bells, was standing with her face to the wall, hurriedly clasping the hooks and eyes of her mandarin, when a voice, close to her ear, said, in tones of fraternal tenderness, "Angie, don't go home to-night — it isn't prudent! Stay here; uncle Dick'll come for you to-morrow; or" — hesitating — "I will."

"O no, George!" she answered, in a tremulous, imploring voice, giving one grateful look up at him, then hiding her face beneath her hood, which she snatched up, put on, and tied with nervous haste, — thus protesting, by deed as well as by word, against being left behind.

"But it's very cold," persisted George, still in a dissuasive tone.

"No matter — I'm quite well now. I *must* go — that is" — faltering at the new thought, and humbly qualifying her former earnestness — "unless there isn't room."

"Plenty of room; if not, you don't suppose I'd take your place?" answered George. "You'll ride all the warmer, you three, on one seat in that wide pung; only it's such a frosty night, I'm afraid —"

"O no, if that's all," answered Angie, interrupting, but not looking him in the face — looking everywhere else, in her nervousness and agitation — "that — that's nothing."

Van Hausen had already marshalled out his sister and Margery; and Angie, with a step tottering less from weakness than from the effect of her first interchange of words with George, and her fear lest his proposition might be carried into effect, made a hasty movement to follow them.

George, having thus proved her resolve, however, gave her no further opportunity to test her strength. More rapid and decisive in his movements than herself, he, without permission or the form of an apology, wrapped a warm overcoat of his own around her shoulders, as an additional protection from the weather, lifted her in his arms, and without suffering her feet to touch the snow-covered side-walk, without even giving her a chance to say good-night to the landlady, who was shivering in the doorway, as she waited there to see them off, deposited her in the vacant space left for her on the back seat of the pung. He then sprang up himself beside Van Hausen — the latter gave an impatient chirrup to his horse, and they were off.

It was a long drive for a cold night, but it was accomplished in safety — almost in silence. An occasional inquiry from George concerning the welfare of the females of the party, and Van Hausen's gruff "Go 'long," to the horse, alone disturbed the meditations of the travellers, whom the events of the day had furnished with ample food for thought, — if they could think in spite of tingling ears and noses, frozen breath, and feet which, in the case of the two old women at least, were almost benumbed with the cold before they reached their destination, in spite of the bricks with which Hannah had been provided in the morning, freshly heated for present use, and such other old-fashioned precautions as had been devised for their comfort by the considerate landlady of "The Pipe and Bowl." Lights were still burning in most of the farmhouses when they reached Stein's Plains, sending out little gleams of radiance to greet the five-years' wanderer, who saw in them each a welcome home, and whose heart, loyal to all its early loves, glowed and throbbed with inward fires, that, like the household lamps, burned the brighter for the wintry frosts outside.

There was no light, no fire, in the cottage on the cross-road to which the travellers were bound; and the snow, with which the wind had toyed all day, lay in a huge oblique drift across the threshold, to which no path was visible. But what

of that? — George's strong arms were ready to carry, first his mother, then Angie, then his aunt Hannah even, through the snow, and deposit them dry-shod within doors, — and this in spite of Hannah Rawle's obstinate resistance, which ended in an almost boisterous struggle between her and her nephew — a genuine burst of laughter on his part, and, on hers, as he set her down in the doorway, the indignant protest, "Do yer think I mind a little flurry o' snow, or that I've lost the use o' my limbs, yer sarcy feller?"

And George remembered just where to put his hand on the mantel-shelf to find the tinder box and flint; he knew where the lamps were kept, and he had not forgotten the way to the wood-pile. Before Van Hausen could turn and drive off, there was a light streaming from the cottage window to guide him down the road; and before the echo of his sleigh-bells had died away, there was a bright fire blazing in the kitchen chimney, and the family circle were drawn up around it. Not to linger long, however, — for Hannah, tired herself, perhaps pitying Margery's exhaustion, for Margery, the weaker of the two, could by this time scarcely hold up her head for weariness, sent Angie to bed, with the curt yet well-meant assertion, "That's the best place for you, child;" and when Angie had gone, resisted all George's entreaties for *one* minute's more delay — the answer to *one* more question.

"No, wait till mornin'; don't yer see yer mother's all tuckered out, Geordie?" were an unanswerable remonstrance and argument; and long before midnight, indeed by the time the lights of Christmas eve had died out in the neighbouring farmhouses, the accounts of this eventful day were closed in the Rawle cottage, and, alone with darkness and with God, its inmates were left to seek refreshment in sleep, to commune with their own hearts in the night watches, or in praise and thanksgiving to Heaven to await the Christmas dawn.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Congratulations.

THERE was no preparation for Christmas cheer in the Rawle cottage. There were associations with the season that for five years past had palsied the hands and hearts of the inmates, and forbidden them a share in the annual festivity, even if they had possessed the means of self-indulgence. This year Van Hausen's customary donation was wanting, and the larder was literally empty.

But George's return had ushered in a new era. Henceforth the day which is the harbinger of joy to the whole earth was to them a commemorative festival of thanksgiving and praise. The Christmas sun had scarcely risen, the household had scarcely met, had certainly had no opportunity to exchange morning salutations and good wishes, when the tide of neighbourly congratulations began to pour in. The news of George's return, and of the discovery of his uncle's murderer, had got wind, and with a concert of action which proved the sympathetic qualities of the people at Stein's Plains, and attested to the popularity of their former favourite, everybody flocked to bid him welcome, and to exhaust themselves with hand-shakings, exclamations, and inquiries, — to say nothing of those quieter demonstrations which took the form of mute wonder, secret heart-throbs, and tears that would not be repressed.

Nor were more substantial proofs of the sympathy and goodwill of the neighbourhood wanting. Nobody came empty-handed. George, the great feature of the day, and destined to be the subject of unbounded discussion and enjoyment in every homestead of the township, could only be figuratively distributed among them; but every family instinctively vied with every other in the ambition to add something to the entertainment which should do honour to him in his own home. So, while he was the centre of an enthusiastic

circle, Angie, somewhere in the outskirts, was continually beckoned aside, plucked by the gown, or, by certain signs and innuendoes, given to understand that the contents of various boxes, bags, and parcels, mysteriously smuggled into the house, were intended as contributions to Mrs. Rawle's Christmas dinner, and recommended to Angie's care. Even old Stein, who was among the earliest guests, dragged from his pocket a half-starved fowl, which had the appearance of having been frozen and thawed several times since it was hung up in his cellar-way. This attention was qualified, however, by the fact that Stein had come with the intention of staying to dinner, — indeed, of quartering himself in the cottage for the rest of the day.

"They might as well have said breakfast," growled Hannah, who, having strayed discontentedly into the pantry, about the middle of the morning, and there found Angie preparing a fat goose for roasting, had learned from her its origin and destiny. "Haven't one of us had a thing to eat to-day except by snatches, what with their comin' an' going an' huddlin' round the fire so, that I haven't had a chance to thaw out my finger-ends yet — much less get the kittle on a bilin', an' have a cup o' tea! I think they might let us have him to ourselves one day at least."

This was not very gracious in Hannah, certainly; but then it must be remembered what a secluded life she had led for years, both on the mountain-top and in the cross-road cottage; how obnoxious she would naturally feel any intrusion upon her habits or her premises, and how distasteful obligations of every sort must be to a woman of her mettle.

The neighbours, with a few exceptions, had the grace, it must be acknowledged, not to linger long. Perhaps the day had its domestic duties and claims upon them; perhaps, having gleaned an outline of the news, they were eager to disseminate it abroad, or talk it over at home. It was the circumstance of their alternating throughout the morning, according to the distance at which they lived, and returning, many of them, later in the day to confirm all they had seen

and heard in a second interview, which caused the cottage from morning till night to be more or less thronged with visitors.

And of course George's story must be recapitulated to every new comer. To say that it was anywise exhausted would be to anticipate the event of a couple of scores of years at least. It was destined to furnish a store of narrative and entertainment which a lifetime could scarcely exhaust, much less a single day. But its essential character, its main features, were detailed so many times, that even Angie, her attention called off continually and her services claimed at every turn, gleaned enough at least to have a vague comprehension of those points in the story which gave rise to the exclamations of surprise and the murmurs of gratitude, that, as she went about her tasks, echoed the swellings of her own heart.

Margery, meanwhile, indifferent to all this coming and going, this buzz of human voices, this unwonted preparation for Christmas cheer, remained all day wrapped in that trance of joy, that blissful delirium, which seemed to lift her into a sort of cloud-land and gave a dreamy expression to her face, on which rested the smile of a perfect content. She asked no questions, not even on points of her son's experience of which she was wholly ignorant; she entered into no communication with anybody; when the neighbours addressed her, as they all did, in tones of earnest congratulation, she suffered this smile of hers to wander to them for an instant, but it immediately returned to its fond allegiance: it was enough for her, silently to gaze on her son, instinctively to know that she was blest. What tender maternity there was in that gaze! But for the wrinkles that time had left on her face, I am confident she must have looked just so once — once only — some thirty years ago, on the morning after George was born.

How radiant with life and strength, and newborn hope, the young man was! With what natural cordiality and grateful warmth he greeted each old friend, and responded to each word of welcome! How worthy he was to be the centre

of a wondering, admiring group, — the tall, handsome, manly fellow, — the village pride always, in view of what Nature had done for him; the village hero now, in view of what he had done for himself!

Not that he boasted of his own achievements. It was his upright countenance, his independent bearing, the facts of his career, which spoke so undeniably in his favour. As to what it rested with him to communicate, never was story more simply told. A wide experience of men and things might destine him to become the future oracle of this and one or two succeeding generations, on topics and events of universal interest; but neither now nor afterwards did he claim for himself or his own exploits other than a subordinate part.

Self-exaltation, indeed, was a trait little likely to become engrafted on George's character. Knowledge of the world, a life of action, a crueller discipline than often falls to human lot, had taught him justly to estimate his own manhood, and promptly to assert his independence, while his every look and movement gave evidence of the force, the vigour, the decision of purpose which he had acquired in the school of a stern experience. But it was genuine growth, not paltry egotism; it was worth, not vanity. The youth who was always ready to bear more than his share of the world's blame, and reap the smallest fraction of its rewards, might rise in the scale of manhood by learning a lesson of self-respect; but he was not likely to sink into the contemptible poltroonery of blowing his own trumpet.

Something of the simple candour, the honest self-depreciation which still forbade him to accept unearned praise, manifested itself continually in the earnestness with which George protested against the encomiums, and qualified even the congratulations, of the neighbourhood.

"Don't say too much about that," he again and again exclaimed, in response to the frequently-expressed approbation of his spirited conduct in breaking away from the narrow sphere of home, his perseverance under difficulties, his enterprising career, and the responsible position he had

achieved. "You speak of what I have accomplished, but you forget all the duties left undone during those long years, the blessings, the opportunities, even the good name that I despised and abandoned, for the sake of adventure and change. When I think of my poor old mother, so shamefully deserted, of uncle Baultie's terrible death coming so soon after, of the old folks' loneliness and poverty, and what I might have been to them, I feel almost glad of all I suffered in Algiers — for I deserved it. Remember that, Johnnie;" and he laid his hand on the head of a youthful listener, who had accompanied his parents, the good blacksmith and his wife, on their visit of welcome; "remember if ever you get discontented and rebellious, and tempted to run away, that though some folks may say, as in my case, 'All's well that ends well,' I tell you that hard work, and starving, and chains, and all the bitterness of slavery, won't seem to you too hard a punishment for your ingratitude and disobedience."

"I didn't mean to leave them so suddenly, and without a word of good-by," he continued, turning to the blacksmith, and making haste to explain what seemed the darkest and most unnatural part of his conduct. "I was as far as possible from intending to leave behind me the bad name of a runaway, or worse still of a suicide; but I had not time or heart to write. I left my messages (and here again I was to blame, I had no business to keep such company) with a man named Bly, a bad fellow, who had been about the tavern for some time. You have heard about him? You know —"

The blacksmith nodded intelligently; he knew all about him; the evidence given yesterday in court in reference to the Baultie Rawle case was town-talk already.

"I didn't suspect then that he was such a hardened fellow, or that he was in league with men worse than himself. It's plain enough now how my messages miscaried. He fled the country, no doubt, almost as soon as I did."

"And your letter to —?" the questioner hesitated, for Stein sat listening, and the considerate blacksmith did not care to introduce Peter's name in this connection; "the letter,

you know, that made us so sartain sure you'd made away with yerself, Geordie — that went straight?"

"O yes, the letter — that was a different thing. It's easy enough to send or deliver a letter, you know;" and to evade further inquiry on this point, George changed the subject. He did not think it necessary to mention that he had entrusted the letter as well as the message to Bly. He was careful to avoid an acknowledgment which might implicate Peter Stein, by proving when and through whom he must have received this communication; nor for the same reason, when the conversation turned upon the strange coincidence which had led to the recovery and identification (as had been so long believed) of his own body, did George attempt to throw any light upon the subject, though he had yesterday declared in confidence to Van Hausen his perfect recollection of having left the coat which, with its contents, had led to the supposed recognition of the corpse, in his cousin Peter's attic chamber on occasion of his last visit to the tavern. "I was excited and feverish," he had said, in explanation of this circumstance; "the coat was heavy and oppressive. I tossed it off there, just before I went out on the racecourse with Nancy. I expected to go back and get it that night; but you know how it was — how I was threatened and driven from the house. I wouldn't have crossed the doorway again for my right hand. God forgive me, uncle Dick!" the tender-hearted young man had exclaimed, with trembling voice, as recollections thronged thick upon him at this crisis of his story; "it lies like a dead weight on my conscience to-day, but I was mortally angry with uncle Baultie that night; I had wicked thoughts of him, and of my uncle Stein too, not murderous ones — Heaven forbid that such an infernal idea as that should ever have crossed my mind — but bitter, revengeful thoughts burned in me like a fire, and I sinned against that old man in my heart."

"Not a bit on't — not a bit on't," had been Dick's cheery reply. "I only wish I'd been there, my boy, to back you up. Stein, the double-faced rascal, told me what happened that

night, an' I knew purty well what had gone afore. But that your uncle Baultie's mind had been pizen'd, and he was in his grave, — a bloody one, — and that the Lord's hand was an' is heavy on Diedrich Stein, — I'd ha' spoke my mind 'fore now, so that it should ha' rung through the Jarseys. They driv' you desp'rate atween 'em, that's what they did. But I'm glad you didn't make way with yerself, Geordie, as we all believed yer had. I stood up fur yer, my boy," slapping him on the back; "yes, an' I believe I would ha' stood up fur yer at the judgment; but I couldn't bear to think yer'd done it. I never could quite get it out o' my head that it might go harder with yer to all etarnity."

Van Hausen and George, harassed by the many yet inexplicable circumstances connected with the tragedy of Baultie's death, and bearing upon the mystery that hung round George's disappearance, had made an effort, during the interval of their absence from "The Pipe and Bowl," immediately after the trial in court, to obtain an interview with Bly, and had gone together to the gaol for that purpose. But Bly was exhausted, literally torpid and insensible with the drain already made upon his strength. The gaoler had wisely discouraged any further attempt to see or converse with him that night, and while awaiting the developments and revelations which might yet be anticipated from this source, Van Hausen and George mutually agreed to avoid as much as possible any discussion of the murder or its agents; and warned by the hint which had dropped from Bly in open court, they were especially careful to avoid any confession which might involve Peter Stein in the affair, or implicate the old landlord himself.

This urgent motive for reticence on their part, as well as the restraint imposed upon every tongue by the presence of the widow of the murdered man, so restricted the curiosity of the neighbours on one vital subject of interest, as to concentrate it all the more intently upon the only other topic of comparable importance; and George's history and experience, from the moment of his leaving Stein's Plains to

that of his return, was demanded in so many forms and by such ingenious queries, that in spite of his native modesty he could not refuse to gratify the truly hearty interest of the neighbourhood, by detailing for their benefit the chief events of his story.

With that delicacy which is an instinct of the heart, not an acquirement of polite circles, these country folks forbore questioning him on the cause and motive of his sudden self-exile. They spared him any reference to his last interview with his uncle Baultie; to the tempest of rage, torment, and indecision which succeeded; to the night of vagrancy and exposure spent in the companionship of Bly, — a companionship not only suffered, but sought and welcomed by the youth, in his extremity of banishment and degradation. They never knew, George never knew himself, until he recalled and weighed it in the light of recent developments, the nature and extent of the temptation to which he was exposed in that bitterest hour of his life. Innocence, even comparative innocence, is sometimes its own protector. George had comprehended the sophistry with which Bly reasoned upon his wrongs, the scheme darkly hinted at by which he might seek compensation. He knew the character of his associate well enough to suspect that he lived by a low system of swindling, and that he would not object to sharing ill-gotten gains; but he hardly believed him in earnest in the proposition to purloin his uncle's savings; indeed he was so preoccupied in the contemplation of the truths forced home to him by Bly's analysis of his situation and prospects, as to be in some degree insensible to the base insinuations which accompanied them. His own degraded position, the danger of sinking lower yet, to which his present associations and companionships exposed him, the door of hope and relief which change and emigration afforded, — these were the suggestions on the part of Bly which absorbed his mind so utterly as to exclude any realizing sense of the pitfall of crime to which Bly was thus paving the way. It was these which inspired him with the sudden resolution to seek Angie, learn his standing and

fate, and act upon that knowledge. And when, scorned by her and branded with disgrace by both his uncles, he was wrought almost to frenzy, even his frenzy took its character from the generosity and harmlessness of a nature which had never wronged or injured aught in the world but itself. Blind indignation, impotent anger, possessed him for a while, but its only fruit was self-contempt, indifference to fate and fortune, or at most a desperate determination to rid the world — his little world of home and neighbourhood — of what his uncle had branded as a public nuisance, to accept the chances of a new destiny, and following Nick Bly's advice, to put sea and land between himself and everything he had known and been in the past.

In vain Bly, taking advantage of his condition and necessities, strove to engraft upon this state of mind the covetous desires, the implacable hate, the readiness for some overt act of revenge which might aid his dark schemes and those of his instructor and employer, Bullet. George was either deaf to his temptations and hints, or but dimly aware of their atrocious significance. Once or twice indeed, as during their dialogue in the stable, startled and shocked by epithets and threats against his uncle, which even the most vulgar and exaggerated sympathy with his own wrongs could not warrant, or disgusted with hints at which his honest soul revolted, George had turned upon Bly with a sudden curse upon his depravity in believing him capable of coveting the old man's gold or wishing him any harm. He little dreamed that what seemed to him but the rank weeds of a night's growth, had a rooted purpose in a heart deeper and harder than that of Bly; that snares set unsuccessfully for him would ever be laid elsewhere; or his uncle's money and life prove the bait and the price.

And Bly, perceiving with surprise that the simplicity and uprightness of George's mind were unperturbed by injustice, and despairing of finding in him a convert and accomplice to crime, checked his confidences at the point where they verged on a betrayal of the wicked plot, and adroitly contrived to

dispel the shadow of suspicion he had excited. Partly to aid this latter purpose, partly perhaps from a natural disposition to oblige an old comrade, he had received and undertaken to transmit to George's mother, after allowing him a reasonable time in which to quit the country, a message of farewell and a promise to write whenever he had anything satisfactory to communicate.

The disposition to oblige could have extended no further than a willingness to set George's mind at rest, for Bly had no expectation of fulfilling this filial injunction; he foresaw too well an event which would, within twenty-four hours, render him a refugee and an outlaw. It was with a more faithful purpose that he took charge of the letter to Peter Stein, for which he even furnished the writing-materials. It will be remembered that Bly had that very evening probed George on the subject of forging his uncle's name; probably he had taken the precaution to have the means at hand for the execution of such an instrument; at all events, he was as well prepared as a private secretary, and on George's explaining the purport of his intended communication, drew from his pocket a crumpled sheet of paper, a little phial of ink, and a stump of a pen, and seated under the shelter of a shed in which the midnight vagrants had sought refuge, he lit and held his lantern for George's use, while he, honourable to the last, penned the document which should make over to Peter the ownership of the forfeited mare. Probably Bly had an interest in this transaction, as he had lately had in most of Peter's fraudulent gains. At all events he faithfully delivered the letter, for which, as will be seen, a convenient opportunity was not wanting.

It was for the fulfilment of these simple and innocent obligations, and for the sake of some sympathy, some companionship, though it might be the worst, that George had accepted in the first instance, and finally claimed, Bly's offer of help in case of sudden emergency. And suspicious as their intercourse might seem, that was all. Fallen as George was, the moral gulf between him and Bly was too wide to be

bridged over by misery on the one side and temptation on the other, and they parted with that sort of amity which is based on a mutual sense of the world's unkindness, but strangers to each other's future.

The following daybreak, which found Bly at a secret rendezvous of himself and his accomplices, saw George plodding on foot towards New York, bent on obtaining a berth in some vessel, bound somewhere, and that immediately; any vessel, any port, he cared not what, so that it took him as far as possible from the scenes of his disgrace, — as far as might be from his former self.

It was at this point in his history that the friendly circle gathered about him felt privileged to institute inquiries, and this was the crisis which served as the commencement of his oft-repeated narrative. He was fortunate enough, so he told them ("or unfortunate enough," he would sometimes add, "seeing all that came of it"), to ship before the mast, with a promise of clearing at once for sea. The ship's officers barely allowed him time to go back and visit home and friends once more, — an impulse he could not resist. He had walked all the way to the city, and returned the same day by a circuitous route, sometimes across the fields, for he was resolved to avoid all acquaintances, all interrogation; and an hour or two before midnight had packed his little bundle, taken a last look of his mother (he omitted all mention of that other leave-taking at the Cousin farmhouse), and was once more on his way to New York. Early the next morning his vessel set sail with a fine breeze, and he was soon far enough away to satisfy the bitter cravings of his heart.

It was probable that George took easily and naturally to the sea, as he always had taken to any mode of life that called for courage, muscular power, activity of all the senses; and this conclusion seemed warranted by the rapid promotion he had recently achieved. But according to his own description the voyage was an ordinary voyage, and he himself an ordinary seaman merely, until the occurrence of that event in which most of his later experience was involved, viz., the

capture of the vessel and her crew by Algerine corsairs. Here began that portion of George's narrative which was made up of violence, tyranny, and suffering in the actual endurance, but which in the recapitulation possessed features of such novelty, mystery, and horror as invested it with all the charm of a romance. To describe the people and the country in which his captivity was passed, and relate in detail all the distinguishing traits of Moorish barbarism which had come under his observation, was George's especial province; the misery and torture endured by the wretched captives of these Barbary corsairs is the province of history, and I have no design of intruding upon either. But there was one circumstance of George's individual experience which had too striking an effect upon his character and prospects to be omitted, more especially as George himself was never known to furnish more than a onesided representation of it. And this was the union, more vital than any that chains could impose, between him and his youthful fellow-captive, a mere boy, delicately nurtured and seeking recreation and invigorated health in a voyage from South America to New York, and thence to the Mediterranean. During three years spent together in slavery, George and this youth were never separated, dragging a common chain and a common lot. Of the love George bore this boy, of the motive with which this love inspired him, of the wealth of knowledge which he had gained from his well-stored brain (for what did one know that the other did not acquire?) George was never slow to speak in the most grateful terms, blessing God for the one alleviation to his miseries which the society of his companion afforded.

But it remained for after-years, and the eloquent tongue of the youth himself, to tell of the days of labour in which George often performed both their tasks; the nights of watching, when the stronger soothed the weaker's pain; of the brave heart that never faltered, the cheerful word that was never wanting, the smile of hope which outlived hope itself, and all the unselfish, heroic efforts by which courage, reason, and life were preserved in the frail form which, but for its

benefactor, friend, and more than brother, must have died daily.

Nor when at last this pair of suffering, half-starved wretches were, by the prowess of our infant navy, released from their hopeless bondage; when one too feeble to rise could only crawl to the feet of their deliverers, and the other hollow-eyed and wasted to a skeleton, was scarcely less a subject for compassion, did George dream of freeing himself from the charge with which he had so long been shackled, or of handing the sick youth over to other guardianship than his own. During the voyage to Syracuse, to which port they were conveyed in a gunboat attached to the American squadron, George's strength was partially recuperated, and though his companion still continued in an invalid condition, George did not hesitate to decline for both any further assistance from the American Government, his independent spirit assuring him that he could thenceforth provide for his own and his friend's wants.

He at once secured for himself a place as seaman in a vessel bound to Liverpool, engaging at the same time, as the price of his earnings on the voyage, a passenger's berth for his companion. The latter had faith that, on arriving in England, the credit his father's mercantile house possessed abroad, would enable him to obtain funds; but he was disappointed in this. The house in Surinam had within a few years made a change in their foreign agencies, and when at last the youth discovered his father's present correspondents in England, they had never even heard of his existence, and refused to trust his story, fraught, as it seemed to them, with improbability.

But George was more fortunate. He had already, on the voyage from Syracuse, been promoted to the duties and pay of the second mate, who was disabled by sickness. At the recommendation of his captain, he now obtained in Liverpool the position of first officer in a vessel about to sail for the Bermudas, with the stipulation, as before, of a passage for his friend; and this voyage safely completed, the young man

found no difficulty in shipping for Surinam, to which point George had made his first duty to accompany his invalid companion.

The restoration of the youth to home and friends, who had long since given him up for lost, involves points of interest sufficiently obvious, but too manifold to be even touched upon here. The unbounded gratitude of his friends to the man who had in so many senses been the preserver of his life, may also be fairly presumed. Nor is the deduction any less certain, drawn from what we know of George's character, that he disclaimed any title to gratitude or praise; that his great heart revolted at the thought that friendship could be anything less than its own reward, or that the reciprocal service affection renders ever could be weighed. But although the independent spirit he thus evinced prohibited the head of a prosperous mercantile house from offering to the penniless sailor any compensation for past devotion to his invalid son and heir, though it was with reluctance that George even permitted the price of his friend's passage from port to port to be refunded, his own nature was so truly generous, so free from either servility or false pride, that he did not hesitate to accept, with the same candour with which it was offered, that countenance, aid, and advancement of his interests which grew naturally out of his friendly and sympathetic relations with the family of the Surinam merchant.

That the latter should urge upon him the captaincy of the "Antelope," a fine little barque then in port, was, no doubt, the prompting of an almost paternal interest in his welfare and success; but it was none the less a promotion in George's legitimate profession, for which he had fitted himself by diligence and devotion to his calling. It was on the shipowner's assurance of faith in his ability, and not on the grounds of a blind partiality, that George accepted the post; a post for which he had resolved to prove his worthiness before ever returning to his country, or reporting himself to the friends who must long since have mentally numbered him among the dead. And who, moreover, as the event proved,

could have received so cordially, and executed so promptly, the commission entrusted to him against those scourges of the sea at whose hands the merchant had suffered only less than the father? On the whole, I may safely assert, that although George could now boast the title and dignity of an experienced shipmaster, and could flatter himself that his recent voyage had proved, in all respects, a successful and profitable one to himself and his owners, these triumphs were not the result of favouritism, but of his own deserts.

And I may safely assert that this was the conclusion arrived at by the rustic crowd that flocked around him on this Christmas morning, claiming his notice and recognition, and vieing with each other in demonstrations of cordiality and good will. Nor, though I claim for George the credit of a modest and unpretending bearing in his new character of a village hero, can I deny that his fellow-townsmen were not a little inflated at the distinction which had befallen the neighbourhood, and that ever after, in rehearsing his adventures and exploits for the benefit of strangers, they would emphasize, with no little complacency, the fact that the subject of them all was born and brought up at Stein's Plains.

But of all the visitors at the cottage that day, there was none whose demeanour was so striking and so inexplicable as that of Diedrich Stein, — old Stein, as he was universally called now. One would have thought that there might be recollections in Stein's breast that would embarrass him, and keep him away. But, on the contrary, he came early and stayed late. It was reasonable to suspect that he would be on the alert to catch every breath of rumour, and weigh every word that might implicate his son, his tavern, or himself, in the mysteries and crimes now being unravelled and brought to light. But though he sat in one seat, almost in one posture, all day, listened intently, and pricked up his ears more sharply than ever at any allusion that struck home, he did not seem to be there as a spy, still less as an enemy.

The expression of his face was that of unmitigated awe and wonder, as if a miracle had been performed in his

presence. He surveyed, followed, watched George with an admiring, almost a deferential gaze. He seemed positively grateful to his nephew for the cordial greeting, which betrayed no remembrance of past injuries, and for the hospitality which endured his presence in the cottage, and even summoned him to the table when dinner was ready; a sanction for which latter act it required all George's tact and coaxing to wring from his aunt Hannah. It could not be the Christmas fare for which Stein thus lingered; for though Angie, suspicious that he meant to stay, naively took care to roast his own fowl for him, he ate little of that or anything else, but sat close at George's elbow, watching him carve and eat, as he might have watched a king at his repast.

Could it be that this withered, lonely old miser had for five years been a prey to remorse? Could it be that, overawed and humbled at George's reappearance, he dwelt upon him with greedy incredulity? Could it be that, disappointed and degraded by the children for whom he had sold his soul to Mammon, he bowed and bent in admiring homage before the success of the youth whom he had systematically wronged? It looked like it, but Hannah Rawle gave him credit for no such uncharacteristic traits.

"Don't go without takin' him 'long with yer," she signified by a sign to her brother Dick, who had modestly delayed his visit until nightfall, and who, at a late hour in the evening, despairing of a chance to outstay Stein, or get a private word with George, at length rose to go.

And when they had gone, — for Van Hausen took the hint, and without mincing matters gave Stein warning that the household were tired, and it was time he went home, — Hannah shook her fist at him, before he was well out of the door, and muttered audibly, "You old rogue, you! What new dodge is this ye're up ter? But we'll be equal with yer — yer game's played out, I reckon."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Quiet Days.

Now succeeded quiet days at the cottage; not so quiet, not so monotonous as in the past, for the old life there, that dull dream, haunted by ghosts of the memory and whispers of the imagination, had been broken up and dispelled. George's presence not only infused that element of strength, activity, and domestic revolution which is the masculine prerogative, but by removing the ban of mourning and mystery from the house, exposed it to those social inroads against which its doors had so long been sealed.

Still Christmas-day, that first day of congratulation and rejoicing, being past, those that followed were days of comparative repose and mental reaction. The lives and thoughts of the cottage inmates settled now into permanence and regularity. Hannah went her rounds of domestic inspection and oversight, and got her meals and her naps at the customary hours; Margery by degrees weaned her eyes from her son's face so far as to take cognizance of other objects, and at intervals to resume her knitting. Angie performed her accustomed duties with a calmness and placidity which were in strong contrast to the tumultuous and passionate agitation which she had so recently evinced, and with the self-reliant energy and perseverance which, as Hannah often used to say, made her weakness worth more than the strength of other women. Doubtless it grieved George, who watched her anxiously, to see how laborious a place she filled in the household, though it might well have been merely by the force of former habit that he easily and naturally resumed all the heavier and more exposed burdens of the family, and so relieved her at every turn. He little suspected how light all labour had become to her now; how work that had been the solace of her pain, was scarcely less a necessity to her in her joy, and how, in her humble and often secret cares for the

comfort of his aunt, his mother, and especially of himself, her love and gratitude found the expression and vent which they yearned for, but were otherwise denied.

None of this household, thus suddenly and strangely blest, sat down to the idle enjoyment of their new happiness, and so suffered it to pall and run to waste, as all happiness does the moment it is rested in, and weighed as the end and goal of life. As for George, himself he was full of interests and occupations, in which all the others were more or less involved. Besides his visits to New York on duties connected with his vessel, which occupied no small part of his time, he began almost immediately to meditate and carry into effect schemes of improvement and repair on his mother's premises. Years of exile had not only intensified George's appreciation of home comforts, but had quickened his eye and hand for the detection and supply of wants and deficiencies which he had formerly overlooked, or been powerless to remedy. Five years of neglect had opened a wide field for his diligence; he brought no fortune to aid his zeal, but his honest earnings had made him, as country folks say, "forehanded;" and the material being supplied, Van Hausen was only too ready to add his skill to the young man's strength.

It was not without many a sigh of pity, many an exclamation of pain, that George, while conducting these repairs, saw at every turn, in the dilapidation of the house and out-buildings, evidences of the poverty and helplessness of their occupants, and realized under what disadvantages and difficulties these poor women had carried on their housekeeping and gardening, and managed to maintain life.

And it was not without heart-throbs that seemed to shake their old frames too mightily, that Hannah and Margery, hobbling or creeping twenty times a-day from their arm-chairs to the windows, marked how tumble-down fences had risen as if by magic; how in the thawing weather, the water that used to leak in everywhere, now came dripping down the neatly-patched roof, or was carried off to the cistern by the new water-spout; how proudly the old cock was proclaiming

to his family the glories of the hen-coop on which George had especially lavished his taste and ingenuity; how smoothly the well-curb, just completed, did its work, and how easily rickety doors and gates swung on their new hinges.

"There's the comfort of havin' a man on the place!" Hannah would say in a self-gratulatory tone; while Margery, saying nothing, would, as she gazed on the many proofs of her son's thoughtfulness and generosity, feel that these things, far more than his robust form and masculine beauty, proclaimed her the mother of one who was "every inch a man."

But though the energies of the family were directed into fruitful channels, and their sources of happiness were multiplied rather than exhausted, their joy was not without a cloud. The Christmas sun had shone through or scattered it. The holiday bustle, the cheers and congratulations of the neighbourhood, had put it to flight, as a high wind drives the threatening storm; but in the quiet and leisure of every-day life it gathered again, obscuring the sunshine, and settling like a shadow on faces that would otherwise have shone with gladness. It was no change that had come over their condition or prospects. It was no new and painful revelations on the part of Bly, from whom no further details or particulars had yet been received. It was nothing that was feared; nothing that was acknowledged; nothing that the most prying observer could detect. Still it was there, exercising its secret influence, making itself vaguely felt, stalking not between eye and eye, but between heart and heart.

"Yes! there were hearts in that cottage which were haunted yet, — there were ghosts of the memory, spectres of the imagination, which darkened the daily life, and forbade the hope of a cloudless future.

Hannah, the only one from whose lot the principal blight neither had been nor could be removed, and who must carry her widowed heart with her to the grave, was the only one who did not come under the cloud to which I refer; the only one who had shaken off the weight of remorse and dread and

bitter memory. She had accomplished her life-work, or rather it had been taken out of her hands and accomplished for her. The suspense, the hatred, the revengeful craving were satisfied. Grief at her old man's fate had from the first been subordinate to these master passions; and now that the stronger emotions were laid to rest, the weaker only revived so far as to add another to the softening, subduing influences that were at work within her. Hannah was changed, doubtless, but it was all for the better. The hard wind that had incrustated her heart had crumbled and fallen away, and the autumn of her life promised riper and mellow fruit than could have been anticipated from a nature so knotted and gnarled. She had leisure now to soften and ripen for another world, for her soul was released from the cares and troubles of this.

But Margery, poor Margery, had found no such complete release, such final deliverance from the shadows that had so long held her bound. Her maternal heart had revelled awhile in bliss, sunk and absorbed in the simple realization of her son's resurrection to innocence, and to her. But this trance of bewilderment, this ecstasy of joy, could not outlast the excitement of the first few days, and instead of subsiding into calm and peaceful satisfaction, the heart that had so long been tuned to woe, was destined gradually to become the prey of fresh tortures. Proud as the mother was of her son, she could not be wholly happy in him. There were recollections that haunted her soul. She would sit brooding over them for hours, more silent than ever; afraid to speak, afraid to indulge the sigh which might betray the subject of her morbid reflections. George's eye, turning on her with filial love, seemed like a reproach; she dreaded every allusion to a past which still had terrors for her imagination to dwell upon. When all the world was envying her the son who had, by his deed of daring, conferred a world-wide benefit on humanity, her heart cried out, "I am not worthy to be his mother!" When he took her in his arms and kissed her, she trembled, and could scarcely refrain from exclaiming, "My boy! my

boy! take back your kiss! You would hate your poor old mother if you knew the wrong she had done you in her heart; if you knew that all these years she had believed you a murderer!" And this thought was poison to her peace. It humiliated her in the presence of George, gave back to her little pinched features their anxious, watchful expression, made her more shy, more reserved, more self-distrustful, a more complete nobody even than before.

Nor was Angie any less the victim of bitter and self-reproachful reflections. Had she not wronged him from first to last; from the days when she tyrannized over him in the past, and slighted his boyish love, up to the moment when that cry of hers in the court-room was wrung from the heart that imputed guilt where there was no guilt? What part could she claim in the present triumph? Humble service, joyfully rendered to him and his, tears of thanksgiving shed in secret, grateful praises to the Source of all good, — these were her portion; but from the general jubilee she felt herself an outcast.

So she went about her daily tasks, calm and pale; and such was the reaction from nervous excitement, such the self-restraint which she imposed upon herself, that amidst the universal rejoicing she alone looked sad. Studiously avoiding observation, she seldom raised her eyes from her work or the floor, except to take note of some household want, or supply an omission to somebody's comfort. Otherwise she suffered her long lashes to droop upon her cheek, and wore on her face that meek and patient expression, which of late had become habitual with her, but which was unfamiliar to George.

In the long talks that took place round the fire-side at night, she bore scarcely any part. The tongue that used to prattle so gaily, charming George into indifference to all other speech, had learned lessons of wisdom and moderation in a stern school, and now was curbed by more than ordinary self-restraint. So, though an attentive and absorbed listener, especially to those stories of George's experience which were drawn from him by the curiosity of Hannah Rawle and Van

Hausen, she rarely asked a question, or volunteered a remark. Nor was the frequently-rising exclamation often permitted to escape her lips, nor the smile of sympathy or tear of pity that would not be repressed, suffered to betray the intensity of her interest, for occupying as usual her low seat close to Margery's side, she was partially sheltered from observation by the person of the old woman, and still more by the attitude with which, stooping towards the fire-light, she would, at the crisis of the story, bent her head over Margery's knitting work, and busy herself in taking up the dropped stitches, or repairing the mistakes of which the once expert but now trembling fingers of Margery were continually guilty.

She did not mean to be cold or indifferent. Quite the reverse. She imposed these things upon herself as a penance. Still less was it pride that actuated her, for remembrances of the past humbled her to the dust. She kept herself aloof as an alien, a foreigner, one who had no part nor lot in the family, except by sufferance, and dared not give expression to feelings which she had lost the right, as she thought, to indulge.

Especially did she shrink from those thoughtful attentions, those brotherly cares on George's part, which were like heaping coals of fire on her head. She even tried to evade them, to do everything that she could without his help, and when his strong arm or ready hand forestalled her, I am afraid she did not thank him with half the warmth his kindness merited.

Worse still. He had brought gifts for her from abroad. Was there still some remnant of hope in his heart? Did it burn higher after the capture of the pirate Bullet, and the recognition in him of his former rival, had disposed of that obstacle? Or would he have brought these things all the same, presented them to her as bridal gifts if he had found her the wife of another, decked her with them to please the eye of rival lovers, or dedicated them to her memory, if dead? I will almost venture to affirm the latter, so disinterested, so inevitable a part of himself was the love he bore her. At all

events they must have been meant for her and no one else, so exactly were they calculated to please her tastes, so utterly unsuitable to the wants of any other friend whom he had left behind him.

He offered them to her with such simple and brotherly cordiality! — merely saying, as he unpacked his sea-chest in the kitchen, "Here, this is for you, Angie — and this! — oh, and this!" and she — she hardly looked at them, dropped them upon the table as if they burned her fingers, and presently, without an expression of pleasure or a word of thanks, left the room. But then she was compelled to choose between this frigid silence, this abrupt departure, or choking words of expostulation, ending in a flood of tears. There was no alternative — and she sought shelter in the former.

It was a pity she should have done this injustice to herself and him. She might have been, ought to have been, as ready to act the part of a frank friend as he was to prove himself an affectionate brother. At least some women so might, and ought. I will not say that this was possible for Angie. I have never claimed for her one of those equally-balanced and harmonious characters, which can coolly weigh a position, or drill themselves to a uniform propriety of action. It is true, her original traits had been greatly subdued and modified. But natures so intense and impetuous as hers must always express themselves in characteristic fashion. Angie had not lost her identity, and she must be pardoned if both her feelings and her behaviour, under her present painful circumstances, partook of exaggeration.

Still it was a pity: for of course George misunderstood it all, was confirmed in his belief that she was suffering cruel mortification at discovering in the pirate Bullet the lover who had so captivated her fancy, and that she was so overwhelmed with grief and horror at his untimely fate. Of course he suspected that if she had pined for any one, it had been for this deceitful gallant; and that so far from cherishing any tenderness for himself, she was more than ever estranged from him, now that, by the part he had played in the arrest and

conviction of his rival, he had, to say the least, associated himself in her mind with this blow to her love and her pride.

He was deeply touched at the intimate and mutually dependent relations which existed between Angie and his mother. He was astonished at the confidence and partiality his aunt, Hannah, manifested towards the former; for though Hannah had a rough way of proving it (a way which sometimes disproved it in strangers' eyes), it was easy for one who knew her well to see how completely she trusted Angie, approved her ways, and at times, in her eccentric fashion, petted and praised the girl, who, by her quick wit and ready tact, exercised vastly more influence over her than any young person had ever possessed before.

George felt that he could never be sufficiently grateful to one, who for nearly five years had served the old folks so faithfully. He was proud to see how the girl of his choice had commended herself to his nearest relatives; as for himself, he would be her true friend always, so far as she would let him; more than that he did not dream of, now that he saw how wholly her heart was estranged from him.

And so these two, arguing from their own mistakes, drew more and more widely apart every day. Sometimes the thought would intrude itself upon George, that this coming home, to which he had looked forward so long, and often so hopelessly, was not, after all, the joy it had seemed to him in prospective. Angie (much as he loved his mother, he could not help thinking of Angie first) could do quite as well without him as with him. Sometimes it even seemed as if he were in her way. His mother, since the first joy at his safe return, was dull, spiritless, and did not appear like herself. It was true she had always been dull and spiritless, but then it was an open, acknowledged depression, which only lay on the surface, and which expended itself naturally in the "Dearie me's!" and the long drawn "Ho — hums!" that proceeded doubtless from a weak chest as much as anything. Now he mistrusted that her lifeless, apathetic moods had a deeper

root; that their foundation had been laid in those long years of desertion and loneliness, for which it was too late now for him to make any atonement. "My poor old mother! She is sadly broken! I ought never to have left her!" Such was the conclusion of his reflections in Margery's case.

George was far from giving way to these desponding thoughts. He found refuge from them in his out-door labours, his excursions in the neighbourhood, all his little plans for the household welfare. If the life-blood was getting torpid in his mother's heart, and her face could not be made glad merely by his presence, he could at least busy himself in erecting a door porch to keep out the cold, or in cutting and stacking the wood which, in the form of a good fire, would be sure to reflect a glow on her face. If Angie evaded his assistance, or found his offers of service oppressive, he could exercise his ingenuity in secretly providing for her wants, leaving her to the supposition that it had been done by fairies.

Then he had always a resource in his aunt Hannah, who, truly blessed in her nephew's society, reaped the benefit of his mother's silence and Angie's reserve, inasmuch as George's most animated sallies, the exuberance of spirits which he occasionally manifested, were inevitably expended on her. And although she tried to be severe, and often pushed him from her with the harsh remonstrance, "Get out of my way — you teazin' feller; you pester me to death!" the smiles that wrinkled her hard face, and now and then the ready retort, encouraged the pestering, teasing fellow, and sharpened his wit against the keen edge of her own.

But these occasions were exceptional. Hannah was too deaf, as well as too old, to engage frequently in contests of wit or raillery, and otherwise the tone of the house was subdued and monotonous. These, as I have said, were quiet days in the Rawle cottage. It was well there was the click of the hammer, the grating of the mason's trowel, to tell of spirit, life, and progress. But for these it would have been too quiet, too monotonous, especially during the stormy days, of which January had more than its usual share this year.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Haunted Hearts Exorcised and Blest.

It was on one of these stormy mornings that George, who had yesterday made a trip to the city, was unpacking his chest in the kitchen, sorting out his sea-clothes and distributing his gifts. Angie's reception of her share of the latter had mortified and discouraged him perhaps, for, without completing the task, he had pushed the chest back against the wall, and gone to exhaust his vexation in hammering away at some of his carpenter's work, greatly to the disgust and annoyance of Hannah, who, having seen a small cockroach escape from the chest and run across the nicely-sanded floor, was apprehensive of more such intruders, and was impatient to have the chest emptied and transferred to the wood-shed.

So, at her entreaty, the task was resumed soon after dinner. The wind had risen and the weather grown intensely cold, compelling all the household to keep snug within the kitchen, and even to huddle round the fire. George was in the midst of them, taking advice, chiefly from Hannah, as to what should be done with this and that article, as he drew them from the chest; whether this would ever be fit for wear again, whether that might not as well be thrown away. At last he reached the bottom of the chest, and sweeping his hand from corner to corner, to make sure that it was quite empty, encountered some object which he had not expected to find then and there, for he started, exclaiming, "Whist! I had forgotten this was here!" then, half-reluctantly, brought to light and held up what appeared to be a soiled and crumpled rag, the very counterpart to just such a rag which had been similarly held up and displayed in that very kitchen once before.

"It's been a greater traveller, I dare say, than its owner," continued George, as he smoothed out and restored to shape a knitted mitten, "but we followed a different course and

compass. The way it's come back into my possession at last is the greatest mystery — the most wonderful coincidence I ever heard of;" and as he spoke, he could not refrain from casting upon Angie a curious, not to say suspicious, glance.

She was startled evidently, and was gazing at this new trophy with wonder and dismay; but George's attention was instantly distracted from her face by Hannah's eager cry, "The mate to my mitten, I vum!" and pouncing upon it like a hawk, the excited old woman tried to snatch it from his hand.

"The mate to *mine*, begging your pardon, aunt Hannah!" responded George, in the loud key which he always used in addressing her; and at the same time, with playful but firm defiance, retaining his grasp of the mitten.

"Yourn?" cried Hannah, incredulously. "How came it yourn?"

"They're both mine, — the pair of 'em," replied George, smiling at her want of faith. "If you've got the mate to this, ma'am" (spoken facetiously), "I'll thank you for it."

"How came you by this, I say, George?" persisted Hannah, with unmistakable earnestness.

"Why, it was mine in the beginning, — always mine," answered George, evasively. "If the mate's in your possession, aunt Hannah, it's only fair you should account for the property, and restore it to the rightful owner."

"Listen then, George," said Hannah, with a solemnity which at once awed her nephew, and with that stern, rigid expression which her face always assumed when memory led her back to the circumstances attending her husband's murder; "I'll tell you how I came by it, an' why I've kept it so long an' so well. I tore it off the hand of one o' them villains that murdered your uncle Baultie. I struggled with him till he flung me outside the house. I would ha' hung on to him an' strangled him if I could; but when I thought I had him fast, he wriggled like a sarpant till he got loose, and nothing was left in my clutches but the mitten he'd slipped his hand out on."

"What! Bullet?" cried George, forgetting the caution he had hitherto preserved on Angie's account. "Then your story just fays into mine, aunt Hannah, for it was among his traps, in the till of his private chest, that I found a heap of gold and silver coins stowed away in this very mitten. It never occurred to me till this minute," he continued, in eager soliloquy, "but I shouldn't wonder if among that specie we could identify some of uncle Baultie's old guineas or Spanish dollars! I handed the cash over to Government with the rest of the spoils. They had 'em there in court, but I never thought of that chance. Strange now if it should turn out so! It's worth looking into. How it would corroborate Bly!"

"Do you mean to say, George," demanded Hannah, with that precise, emphatic enunciation which indicated the intense difficulty her mind had in crediting this new revelation, "do you mean to say that that 'ere mitten is yourn, and that you never laid eyes on it from the time you went to sea till it turned up in the way you speak on?"

"I mean just that, aunt Hannah! That man, Bullet —"

"That devil!" interposed Hannah, under her breath.

"Had 'em both," continued George; "wore 'em, no doubt. They were a decent pair of mittens once. I was proud of 'em, I know. He lost one, it seems — the one you've got, and this, being good for nothing else, he used it for a money-bag. How he came by them in the first place, Heaven only knows! I'm sure I don't;" and here George stole a side-glance at Angie, which might have been interpreted to mean, It's just possible you do. "Anyhow, as it was mine I ventured to take possession of it as a curiosity;" and George turned it over and scrutinized it closely.

Margery trembled. Angie, as she stood watching him, felt as if he were dissecting her conscience, and turning her heart inside out.

"You're sure it's yourn?" reiterated Hannah.

"Sure? yes, indeed; would have sworn to it anywhere."

"Geordie!" cried Hannah, with a sudden burst of emotion, and staggering back to her chair, she braced herself

against its arms as if her strength were forsaking her, and she felt the need of some support. "Geordie, you send a cold shudder through me when you call them mittens your'n. Day an' night, day an' night, for the last five year, I've called the deepest curses down on the man that them 'ere belonged ter, wherever in the world he might be. I've prayed that the sun might scorch him, an' the cold send a shiver through his bones; that hunger might gnaw him, an' his tongue be parched fur a drop o' water; an' that he might cry out to cruel men to help him, an' that they might be deaf to his prayers. Geordie! when I think of all you've suffered by sea an' land, it almost seems as if the Lord just took me at my word."

"The Lord's too just for that, aunt Hannah," answered George. "He would never have made me the victim of curses that I didn't deserve, and that were not meant for me. You needn't trouble yourself about that."

George spoke in a soothing, persuasive tone; but he was none the less shocked at Hannah's acknowledgment of the terrible spirit of hatred and revenge that had rankled in her heart. There was no need for him or anyone to reproach her with it, however. Self-reproach was working within her rapidly enough.

"You're right, George; the Lord makes no mistakes," replied Hannah, in the tone of one communing with her own thoughts. "But oh, what mischief *we* make in our ignorance! How we tempt His providence! We'd better set still and wait fur Him; He comes in his own good time, an' brings with Him justice an' judgment. It's well He kept me in the dark — wholly in the dark. I'm thinkin', George," — and as this gleam of thought broke upon her, she leaned forward in her chair, shuddered, and laid her hand impressively on her nephew's shoulder, — "I'm thinkin' how many times I've looked at that leetle bit o' proof, an' felt as if all I needed in this world was to know the name of its owner, an' so bring him to the gallers;" and rising as she spoke, moved by a

sudden impulse, she started towards the bed-room to bring forth her treasure from its hiding-place.

"But you might have known," called George, just as Hannah was retreating from the room; "you must have been blind not to see —"

A sudden "Oh, hush-sh-sh!" in a terrified, but half-suppressed voice; at the same time a hand placed over his mouth, another grasping at and endeavouring to cover and hide the fatal initials, marked with red, on which his finger was resting emphatically; these were enough to arrest his words and cause him to look up inquiringly in the face of Angie, who, as he knelt beside the chest, was bending over him, her attitude, her voice, her countenance imploring him to refrain.

"Why hush?" he ejaculated, alarmed by her impetuosity, and puzzled at her warning.

"Oh, because — because — she —" pointing towards Hannah, "she doesn't susp — She never knew —"

"Knew what?" cried George.

"Oh, nothing — no matter — only — the letters! Don't show her — there, she's coming!" and her brief and imperfect expostulation interrupted by Hannah's return, Angie retreated abruptly, and resumed her former place and attitude.

"Just alike! — a complete pair!" was George's comment, as claiming Hannah's mitten (he took care not to relinquish his own) he laid the two together, — the red letters (scarcely red now, time had faded them so much) adroitly turned inwards, and concealed. He had understood enough of Angie's expostulation for that.

Hannah, who, thanks to her deafness and her self-absorbed state of mind, had heard and suspected nothing of the dialogue and pantomime which had taken place while her back was turned, looked on through her spectacles. "That's a fact, — not a doubt on't!" was her confirmatory verdict. Then she stretched out her hand to take the mittens and compare them herself.

George held them up before her, drew out the thumbs, displayed the exact measurements. But that would not suffice, — she must handle them herself. Reluctantly submitting to necessity, George yielded them. She smoothed them out slowly, meditatively. She even examined the width of the seaming at the wrist. “Two an’ three,” she muttered, counting the ribbed stitches of one; “two an’ three,” as, turning the pair over, she examined the opposite wrist. Then she handed them back to George, and he, for safe-keeping, hastily put them in his pocket. She had satisfied herself completely, but she had not separated them — had not detected the letters.

The accident of her doing so, or failing to do so, made all the difference of her mastering the secret which had for five years moulded the lives of Margery and Angie, or of her going down to her grave in total ignorance of it. Chance — shall we not say Providence? — determined the matter; for had the case been reversed, I am afraid that in spite of all the lessons of forbearance which Providence was teaching her, she could never, from that time to the day of her death, have forborne occasionally twitting the other two with their injustice to Geordie. “Women,” if it is fair to quote from so prejudiced an old bachelor as Van Hausen, “do peck at one another so!”

To what extent her own suspicions of her nephew might, under like circumstances, have been carried, it is impossible to say. Now that light had been thrown upon the whole transaction, she doubtless acquitted herself of any such fallibility — as human nature, untested by temptation, generally does acquit itself. This was evident from the tenour of what followed.

“That’s right; put it out o’ my sight for evermore,” she said, as she watched her cherished bit of proof disappear within the depths of George’s pocket. “It’s been fuel to my wrath long enough. It’s lucky I kept it so snug an’ miser-like. I never should ha’ found out it was yourn, Geordie, but other folks might ha’; an’ who knows what it might have led ter?”

Next thing, like's not, people 'ud ha' been mistrustin' you coveted your uncle Baultie's gold, and had a hand in killin' him, that the inheritance might be yourn. *I* never would ha' mistrusted yer, my boy, not *I!*" she added, hastily; "you needn't think *that*" (there must have been something in George's face that prompted her to this assurance); "but seein' you was missin' so soon arterwards, there *are* people in this world who'd ha' been wicked enough to *think* you did it, if they hadn't accused yer on't outright. But I thank God," she added fervently, "that shortened the hand of a foolish old woman, and took the cause o' justice into His own! We miserable critturs do a deal of evil an' mischief in our lives; but we little know how much we're saved from doin' by a power stronger than our own will. From this day forth, an' fur the sake o' this great deliverance, I'll never try again to right my own wrongs. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' saith the Lord."

With which solemn ejaculation, uttered with hands clasped and eyes upraised, Hannah turned and left the room, — perhaps to hide the emotions which made her knees knock together — possibly to sink upon those knees in the privacy of the little bedroom, and confirm her grand resolution in prayer to God; for Hannah, though a stern and an erring, was none the less a devout, religionist.

And those wicked people to whom she had made such cutting, though accidental, allusion! There were but two in the world; two vile creatures, to whose consciences her reproach struck home, and there they stood, condemned. Yes; there was no escape for them.

"*She* never knew! *she* never suspected!" exclaimed George, starting impetuously to his feet the moment the door had closed upon Hannah. "But *you*, mother! *you*, Angie! you suspected — you believed? Good Heaven! that's too much; that can't be!"

Margery's hands, those eloquent hands, were raised in supplication, her shadowy form bent back, almost crouching

as if she were striving to ward off a dreaded blow. Angie's breast heaved; her face was turned away.

"It is, though! it is! You did me that terrible wrong, both of you. I see it!" he cried, seizing Margery's culprit hands, at the same time forcibly turning Angie's face towards him, and as he thus held both at arms length, compelling them to meet the gaze which shot rapidly from one to the other. Then he groaned; for there was no denial in either countenance, and he knew all.

"Tell me," he now exclaimed, and with fresh vehemence, "I must know the truth; tell me—did you believe me a murderer, — my uncle's murderer?"

Margery only echoed his own groan. "Don't ask me, Geordie," was the agonized ejaculation of Angie.

"Your own son!" to his mother. "The man who had loved you so!" to Angie. "It was too bad! By Heaven, it was too bad!"

"It was," murmured Angie; "it was!"

"Georgie," faltered Margery, "I never owned it; I never breathed it, not even to myself — not even to God in my prayers."

"Nor I," sobbed Angie; "nor I."

"But you believed it," he cried, with bitterness; "you believed me an unnatural, cruel, blood-thirsty villain! My last prayer to both of you when I went away, was to think the best of me whatever happened, and you have thought the worst. I'd better never have come back; I'd better have wasted away in slavery, or been buried at the bottom of the sea, than to have lived to learn this. O mother! O Angie!" And releasing them both from his grasp so suddenly that they staggered, so indignantly that the act seemed to imply that he had done with them for ever, he caught his cap from the table, and dashed out of the house.

His usually ruddy face was white with anger or wounded feelings, — probably a mingling of both; they knew that the bitter reproaches he had uttered were but a faint indication of the storm of emotion that was seething within him; that his

tender, loving nature was wounded to its innermost depths, — such depths as only exist in hearts so trusting and affectionate as his; and that he had rushed from their presence simply as a precaution against the further explosion that threatened.

It is not much to see a man who is habitually ill-tempered, violent, or pugnacious, irritated and touched to the quick. One may even become so familiar with his exhibitions of passion and wrath, as to view them only with indifference or contempt. But let the peaceable, the confiding, the manly soul be roused to indignation, or moved to anguish, by a deep sense of injustice or injury, and whose heart is not sympathetically stirred, — who, having wronged such a one, does not feel how irreparable is the injury done, how hopeless the attempt to heal a wound so deep?

Such was the sympathy, such the hopelessness with which the thoughts of Margery and Angie followed George in his flight. They did not exchange a word; there was nothing to be said. They did not even exchange glances; they shrank from the conviction written in each other's faces. There was no longer any secret between them, any counsel to take, anything to be done.

Except to wait — wait and see what came of it. How long the hours seemed! for hours passed on, and he did not return. As twilight and night came on, shadowy and bitter cold, what shadows of suspense, what cold shudders of dread haunted their aching hearts! Will he come back at all? Will he speak to us? Will he forgive us? Will he ever love us after this? Such were the hard questions which kept up a continual knocking at the door of these haunted hearts, and a desponding voice within was constantly answering, "Never!"

Hannah's ignorance of what had transpired was certainly a subject for gratitude. She wondered when she returned to the kitchen what had become of George, and when they told her he had taken his cap and gone out, she wondered that he should go out such a cold afternoon. She wondered still

more that he had left his sea-chest there in the middle of the floor, in spite of all the fears she had expressed about the cockroaches. And after she had exhausted herself with wondering that he did not come home to tea, that he should be so fond of gadding, and so indifferent to fireside joys (Hannah, be it here remarked, was always jealous of his leaving the house for an hour), she still further evidenced her discontent by going to bed a little earlier than usual, muttering as she went, "If he chooses to stay out until ten o'clock at night" (it was only a quarter to nine) "he can't expect folks as old as I am to set up fur him."

He did not expect nor wish it. Not long after nine, the hour when he knew she invariably retired, his hand was on the door-latch; and as he lifted it, the hearts of Margery and Angie, who sat watching and waiting by the fireside, leaped up also, and, instinctively moved by a common impulse, they rose to meet him, as if he had returned after weeks of absence.

A stranger would have thought he had, — for he walked straight up to his mother, and embraced her tenderly; then drew Angie towards him, lifted her face gently, solemnly, just as he did when he parted from her so many years ago, and kissed her in the same spot on her forehead. Then the young girl knew she was forgiven; and the old woman, clinging to her son, felt that she was blest.

With what generous protective love he now gazed from one to the other, his left arm twined round and supporting his mother, his right hand clasping one of Angie's! What a different expression his face wore from that which had distorted and clouded it a few hours ago! How serene he was! What a depth of tenderness was reflected in his mild blue eyes! What a victory he had won over himself!

Yes, won over and for himself — God helping. There are some natures in the world that, like the cloudy sky, the storm-lashed ocean, have a power and depth by means of which their atmosphere is cleared, their serenity regained, without foreign aid, through their own inherent forces.

George's was one of those great souls that needed only to be left to itself awhile. No earthly power had helped him; he had simply come to his better self; and when he spoke, when he called them both by name, there was a touching melody and pathos in his deep, earnest tones. "Dear mother, dear Angie," he said, "I have come back to tell you that I've got over it. It was a great shock, but I've been thinking about it. I understand it better now; you mustn't mind my feeling it so much at first; I couldn't help it, you know. But it's all right now; we'll never speak of it, we'll never think of it again!"

He would have been content to let the matter rest here — but not they; they were far from content. With one voice they both cried, "Oh, George, can you forgive us? Are you sure you can, and will?"

"Mother — Angie," he resumed, in reply, "when God's hand was heavy upon me, when I saw in each day's starvation, and misery, and chains, a just punishment for my wasted youth, my ingratitude, my hard, revengeful heart, I vowed again and again to pardon my fellow-creatures every injury, known or unknown, as I hoped and prayed God would some day have pity on and pardon me. He has mercifully heard my prayer. Heaven forbid that I should defraud Him, or wrong my own soul by taking back the vow!"

Awed by the solemnity of his voice and words, his hearers trembled, and remained silent.

"Do you think," he earnestly continued, "that when toiling under an African sun, I pined for one breath of Jersey air, when there was no heaven to my mind like the heaven of home; when I would gladly have died if I could but take my mother's hand in mine" (and he pressed the withered hand), "or have one more look at the face I loved best in the world" (and he gazed fondly into Angie's eyes); "do you think then I asked myself, what or how much *I* was to *you*? No! the less the better, for your sakes; I only knew — I only felt, that *you* were life, happiness, everything to *me*.

"And now," he exclaimed, with fresh fervour — the sobs of the two women alone interrupting him, — "now that I am a free man, and at home once more, with you in my arms, mother, with you, Angie, by my side, do you think I can have it in my heart to reproach you because, when I gave you reason to believe nothing but evil of me, you laid more guilt to my door than I really deserved? What had I ever been or done that should save me from the suspicion or disgrace that must light on somebody's head? Nothing: it was all the other way. I had been a good-for-nothing scapegrace, to say the least. But let bygones be bygones; and, please God, for the rest of my days I'll be so much better son to you, mother" (and he gave her a filial hug), "so much worthier friend to you — if you'll let me, Angie" (and he laid his hand protectingly, beseechingly, on her head), "that if fate parts us again, I'll leave behind me no dark memories to poison your faith in me and blacken my good name."

They tried amid their sobs to protest against this humility of his, to contradict his self-aspersions, but it was of no use. As usual, his generous nature had taught him to look away from the wrong he had suffered and remember only the wrong he had done; and that he might forgive them with a better grace, he persisted in taking all the blame on his own shoulders, — those broad shoulders of his that were always ready to bear everybody's burdens.

And when they reiterated their assurances that they would have trusted him, that they had trusted him, more entirely than any other man living; that nothing but the evidence of their own senses had deceived them, he interrupted them with — "I know, I know; the evidence was damning — nobody can deny that; my rage against uncle Baultie, my desperation and threats of vengeance, my skulking off as I did at dead of night; and then that mitten, of your own knitting, mother — with my initials on it that you marked yourself, Angie!" Then, in a tone of eager curiosity, he added abruptly, "Who ripped out the mark?"

"I," answered Angie penitently, mortified as she thus acknowledged the suspicion which that act implied — "I, that first night when she was asleep."

"I thought so! Bless you, Angie; whatever your own suspicions were, you saved me from public degradation and shame. Aunt Hannah may say what she will now, but with such evidence against me, and her wrath to back it, I shouldn't have stood much chance: she'd have blasted my good name for ever. And her curses on the owner of her bit of proof, — you were continually hearing them and trembling! Good Heavens! you must have been glad when you learned that I was in my grave, — a Judas' grave, though it was!"

They did not deny it; they assented to it, if silence could be so interpreted.

"And when I came back so unexpectedly — when you saw me in the court-house — when Bly stood up to testify — did you think then —? Of course you must have! You did — both of you! Your panic of fear, mother, when you rushed into my arms! Your cry of terror, Angie," he exclaimed, as one recollection after another flashed upon him. "Did you think that fatal finger of his was pointed at me?"

"How could I help it?" moaned Margery, "how could I help it, Geordie, when my burstin' heart was pintin' the same way in spite o' me?"

"He had promised me," cried Angie, "and I believed him. I told him you were dead, and he promised. You were alive again, and I thought it was all over with you. I didn't know what I did, — I was mad with horror and fear!"

"He promised! What, Bly? It was you then that deceived him, — being yourself deceived! I thought it was Polly, poor Polly Stein; everybody thought so."

"No, it was not Polly. She was in the court that day; I saw her there myself; but she was not in the prison. She had nothing to do with it. It was I that planned all that mischief. Providence overruled my folly and blindness, but God knows I did it for the best!"

"Brave girl! of course you did it for the best; I should be the last man to question that. You did it for the salvation of my good name; you tried to silence him for my sake. Tell me about it — tell me all."

She told him as well as she could, in broken phrases and with a stammering tongue; he and Margery mute with wonder at her courage and the ready tact with which she had improved her opportunity. It was reserved for Bly, when he should know the whole (and in justice to him, he was made at last to understand how unintentional was the deception that had been practised upon him), to dwell with rude eloquence upon the love and devotion with which she had pleaded her cause; a love and devotion which the poor outcast depicted in the more glowing colours, because to him they were things new and strange. But for the present the simple fact of the effort she had made in his behalf was enough for George, — was more than he could at once credit or comprehend.

"Good God!" he devoutly ejaculated when she had finished, "what things this dear girl has done, and dared, and suffered for my sake! My share has been nothing to it. And yet you talk of forgiveness," he added, in a chiding tone to his hearers, "as if I had anything to forgive; I whom it becomes rather to think of thanks, not for all you have done and tried to do to save and protect my good name (though I owe you much for that), but for the love that outlived all, — that's what touches me, mother, — that's what I find it hard to believe in, Angie!" and his voice was stifled and broken with emotion.

"And your cry, Angie; that terrible cry in the courtroom," he continued, with difficulty mastering his agitation, and only by a great effort bringing his mind to a realization of the truth that was dawning upon him; "it was not for him, then, after all?"

"For *him*? For whom?" asked Angie, in surprise, and looking inquiringly into George's face.

"For Josselyn — Bullet, I mean. I — I — thought —"

"Oh, George!" was the reproachful exclamation with which she interrupted and relieved his hesitation, "did you suppose I could ever care for such a wretch after *that* night?"

"What night, Angie?"

"The night that you bade me good-by, Geordie; the night that was the beginning of our five years' misery."

"I feared — I mistrusted. Oh, what shall I say? In one word, then, I was blind. I was a fool, Angie; but I see! I see now!" (Her blushes and tears at this moment were greater tell-tales than her tongue.) "And for the future I will be a wiser and, you may believe me, a happier man. Dearest mother, dearest Angie, if your hearts have been so true to a poor fellow in spite of the crimes of which you have believed him guilty, I am sure you will not love him less now that his innocence is proved. Oh, such love pays for all! Only forget the past, mother, just as if it had never been; only keep on loving me, darling girl" (he had drawn the darling girl so close to him that he whispered this last petition in her ear), "and I for one shall not think all I have suffered, and ten times more if need be, too great a price to pay for so much happiness."

And releasing them both from the embrace in which he had clasped them as he spoke, he turned hastily away to hide the not unmanly tears which he could no longer restrain.

Margery drew a long sigh — one of those sighs of relief so familiar to her acquaintances of former days, but latterly never indulged in — a deep expressive sigh, on whose breath the accumulated burden of years seemed to be exhaled and dissipated.

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me?" she fervently exclaimed. Then, for the first time in many years, assuming the prerogative which became her as head of the household, and instinctively fulfilling to the letter the pious custom of her husband, — since his death fallen into disuse, — she said authoritatively, "Let us con-

sult God's holy word. My son, read the one hundred and sixteenth psalm."

George reverently took the old family Bible from its shelf and obeyed her.

Then the old woman fell on her knees; those knees that never again were to tremble with apprehension of human wrath, and folded together in peace those hands no longer the index to a troubled soul. Then the tongue that for years had cleaved to the roof of her mouth was loosed, the voice that horror and dread had well-nigh palsied broke forth mellow and clear, the gift that had once made Margery Rawle the leader of church and prayer-meeting descended mightily upon her, and George and Angie, feeling their souls taught of the Spirit, followed where she led the way, and united in the offering of praise and thanksgiving which her inspired tongue laid on the altar of the Most High.

And thus these hearts, haunted so long by painful memories and mighty dread, mercifully released at last, exorcised, purified, blest, were rendered unto Heaven, — voluntary sacrifices, consecrated gifts, the only acceptable sacrifices, the only worthy gifts which Humanity can render unto God for all His benefits.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Dark Side of the Picture.

No formal and connected narrative of the circumstances attending the death of Baultie Rawle was ever extracted from Nicholas Bly, nor were charges against any parties preferred by him of sufficient coherency and weight to warrant the interference of Government or the apprehension of suspected individuals. Such hints and explanations as dropped from the wretched man were chiefly in the form of spontaneous confessions and involuntary acknowledgments made to George, who, after allowing him a few weeks in which to recuperate the strength expended on the day of the trial,

visited him frequently in his cell, aided in the fulfilment of the promises held out to him as a motive for confession by ministering to his necessities, and inspired him with a degree of confidence which the gaoler and the prison chaplain had failed to awaken. Disjointed and fragmentary as these hints were, enough could easily be gathered or conjectured from them to throw light upon whatever mysteries connected with this foul transaction still remained unsolved.

It did not appear, nor was it by any means probable, that Bly was otherwise than a stranger to Bullet until a period immediately preceding the Christmas races at Stein's Plains, when Bullet, who had a keen eye for the choice of his tools, contrived to bring him under his diabolical influence. Employed in the first place as a pander to the vices and frauds of this high-handed villain, believing in him implicitly as an aristocrat and a gentleman, Bly was readily induced to lend himself to crimes of greater magnitude, varnished and gilded as they were by the artful hand of this magnate in villany. Not until their design of extracting money from Baultie Rawle, through the agency of George, had signally failed, did Bullet broach the more desperate scheme which was finally resolved on, and in the fulfilment of which this cool and practised knave took care to place Bly always in the foreground, shrouding himself in such obscurity, guarding himself by such nice precautions, that not even so much as his delicate footprint on the snow could be brought up as evidence against him, and that Hannah Rawle alone protested against the otherwise universal belief that but one individual had been engaged in the transaction.

And yet Bly persisted to the last, and doubtless with truth, that, while assenting to the plan of midnight robbery, he had never meditated murder; that while coveting Baultie's chest of gold, he had been no party to any scheme of further outrage; that even in the final struggle he shrank from the old man's cries, and would have had pity on his grey hairs and fled from the house empty-handed, but for the stern command of his leader, and plainly his master-spirit, Bullet.

With bitter and vindictive reproaches, aggravated by the keen pangs of remorse which now preyed upon him, Bly told how, at the critical moment, Bullet, perceiving the old man's obstinate defence of his property, sprang upon the scene armed with the broken sleigh-runner, and flinging the fatal missile within reach of his accomplice, charged him, with a terrible threat, to "Strike hard and strike home, and silence the old brute's cries."

"And then, when I'd done as he bade me," continued Bly, "and he'd disposed of the old ooman — and a tough job he had of it, for she was a she-wolf to deal with — to see him set down an' overhaul the money-box, an' count out the cash as cool as if we'd 'arned it by an honest day's work, an' slip all the gold into his own pocket, an' trample on the old man's body 'afore it was cold, an' laugh at me for a white-livered fool! Ah, I tell yer, Mister Geordie, that's but the beginnin' o' the dark deeds that I've seen done under his flag; but because it was the fust, an', as fur's I was consarned, the blackest, it'll haunt me to my dyin' day, an' foller me like my shadder inter the world to come that the parson tells about. Bless yer stars, Mister Geordie, that when yer fortunes was low, and yer friends was false, you never give ear to my bad counsels, much less put yerself in the power o' that limb of Satan, Bullet. Do you know, Mister George" (and here Bly raised himself in bed and gazed with admiring wonder in the young man's honest face), "do yer know why I believe in you, and trust in you, more'n in anybody else, even the parson — an' he ain't a bad feller, either —? Wal, I'll tell yer. It's because you're the only man that ever I see fight the devil an' beat him when once he had yer down."

No confession of Bly's served to implicate either Diedrich or Peter Stein in the cruel outrage which lay so heavy on his own conscience. Diedrich was doubtless not only ignorant, but innocent of the whole transaction, except so far as (to quote Bly's charge against him in court) that tavern of his was the nest where all the mischief in the Jerseys was hatched. His son, however, though guiltless of any parti-

cipation in the crime, could not be thus wholly exonerated from a knowledge of its authors, except on the plea which Bly always inserted in his favour, — namely, that Pete was such a thick-headed numbskull, and for the most part so muddled with rum, that it was doing him too much credit to say that he really knew anything. It was true that all the phlegm of his Dutch ancestry had in him degenerated into downright stupidity. Still Bullet had found, either in his dulness or his wit, the material for a useful, though a mean and despicable tool, and Peter had been in league with the lordly villain at an earlier date even than Bly. It was by means of his landlord's son, indeed, that Bullet gauged the character and abilities of the various rogues that came under his eye, and marked his future accomplice. It was Peter's knowledge of the training and accomplishments of George's mare which ensured success to her competitor in the race; for it was no other than Peter's familiar voice which whistled Nancy off her course. It was his compliant tongue which first gave hint of his uncle Baultie's possessions, and which finally threw light upon the nearest road to his house, his personal habits, the whereabouts of his strong box. Peter's attic-room, too, was the secret rendezvous of his fellow-conspirators; it was here that they met by appointment on the night of the murder, and here that Bullet, after returning from his visit to Angie, proved himself ready for any game that offered, high or low, by beguiling the time until midnight in playing at old sledge with the maudlin youth and winning his last cent.

Although, as Bly acknowledged in further extenuation of Peter, they did not leave him that night until he was stretched on the floor in a drunken stupor, in which he no doubt lay until long after the murder had got wind, and the murderers made their escape from the neighbourhood, it was next to impossible that he should have been ignorant of the parties concerned in the atrocious deed. That his stupidity did not amount to ignorance, and that his conscience failed to acquit

him of a share in the guilt, were evidenced by the persevering secresy which he maintained on the subject; a secresy which, considering the shallowness of his brains and their frequent bewilderment with drink, must have been due to the instinct of self-preservation. But though safe from justice and the retributions of the law, who can tell how large a share fear, horror, and remorse might have had in hurrying the young man to his ruin? and how busily these haunting spectres had been employed in digging the grave — a drunkard's grave — which had long been yawning for him?

"I tell yer, Mister George," exclaimed Bly, after alluding to the easy prey which Peter had been to the arts of Bullet, "that man was one that had a stomach for everything that was a goin', and was as cool an' as greedy as a shark. He even knew how to make the most of his bad luck. Do you remember the arm he carried in a handkercher, an' the wound they nussed up so careful fur him at Stein's? Wal, that was an ugly gash that he got with a cutlass, not long afore, a boardin' a misfort'nate brig, — so I larned arterwards from one o' the gang; and Bullet made it tell there among the country-folks, an' specially 'mong the gals, as if it had been a ginteel wound, an' he the hero of a man-o'-war. And as to 'propriatin', whatever come handy, great or small, it was a caution jest to see what a talent he had fur that. It made me open my eyes — and I wan't no chicken either — to see him walk into your great-coat the cold night we went out on that murderin' business. Why, he took it down from a peg on the wall as unconsarned as you please, buttoned every button up snug, and drew them woollen mittens o' yourn on to his sleek white hands more like a student-lad in a consumption, that was goin' a sleigh-ridin' with the gals, than a hardened son o' the devil that was bound on an errand o' blood. But number one was his motter, an' his own comfort was a thing he knew how to look out fur. Why, he'd lord it like a prince over old Stein in the parlour; make love to his darter, to her ruin, in the kitchen; cheat Pete out of his last copper at old sledge; steal your coat; wind up with the murder o' yer old

uncle; an' sleep as sound arter his night's work as a farmer-boy arter a huskin' frolic!"

"My great-coat, Bly?" cried George, catching eagerly at the one clause in this summary of crime, which, though thrown out merely in illustration of Bullet's light-fingered propensities, had a deeper significance than this to the owner of the garment. "My coat, with the metal buttons, that I left in Peter's room at the tavern? What more about that, Bly? — I have an interest at stake there."

"You hope to recover the property, do yer?" queried Bly, with a mingling of simplicity and facetiousness.

"I have recovered it. My folks at home have had it laid up in lavender these five years."

"Yer don't say so! That's a tough story for me to swaller! I can't make that out no how!"

The expression of Bly's face was a mixture of wonder and incredulity. "Jest tell a feller how that 'ere thing come about, if yer can."

George related the tragical particulars attending the recovery of the clothing; the time and place of the discovery of the corpse, and its supposed identification, making no comment, offering no conjecture, purposely leaving Bly to an unbiassed deduction from the facts, and earnestly hoping that he would be able to fill in the meagre outline and explain the mystery.

Nor was he disappointed. Bly listened with the intense eagerness, the sharpened curiosity, of one who had a vital interest in every word. Repressed passion distorted his features, firm conviction dilated his eye, as George proceeded; and almost before his tale was completed, they burst forth in the words "The all-fired rascal! Here we have him at his own work agin! So, Cock Roger, my fine feller, that was the end you come ter, was it? I allers mistrusted you'd met with foul play!"

These explosions, though significant, were enigmatical to George, and the deep mutterings and imprecations against the pirate captain which succeeded, merely proved that

George's story had excited in Bly suspicions that were fresh fuel to his rage against Bullet. But by patiently waiting for the storm to subside, and adroitly leading the mind of Bly back to memories connected with the man whose fate he seemed to deplore, George at length gleaned the following facts.

During the few days which intervened between the murder of Baultie Rawle, and the sailing of a vessel, nominally a merchantman commanded by Roger, but in reality the pirate craft of Bullet, Bly had, with others of the crew, found a lurking-place in a disreputable haunt just on the edge of the wharf from which their vessel, then lying at anchor in the stream, had lately cleared. Frequent disputes and quarrels had here arisen between the members of the gang, who spent most of their time in gambling, and were usually more or less inflamed with brandy; but the most noticeable and obstinate difficulty was one which occurred between Bullet and Roger, hitherto the most fully trusted and esteemed of his men. This contest had its origin in a division of the profits resulting from some illicit transaction; and the property stolen from George, and accepted by Roger as a make-weight in his share of the spoils, gave rise to the fierce dispute which ensued. Cock Roger, who had somewhat reluctantly consented to receive the coat in lieu of a considerable sum which he claimed as his due, was proportionately elated at discovering the watch which, hitherto concealed in the breast pocket, had escaped the notice and the clutches, of Bullet. But his triumph was cut short by a demand for its restitution on the part of Bullet, who secretly chafed at being worsted by his subaltern, and covetous of the watch, a valuable time-keeper, swore that it was not included in the bargain. High words succeeded. Accusations and threats were not wanting on either side. For once the authority of Bullet was defied; Roger maintained his ground, and the quarrel seemed about to terminate in a personal struggle and wrestle for the prize, when abruptly, and to the amazement of the spectators, Bullet, finding his antagonist

resolute, ceased to urge his claim, suffered the dispute to subside, and seemed by his sudden withdrawal from the contest to acquiesce in Roger's view of the case.

"But nobody congratulated him," was Bly's comment on this point of his narrative. "Not a man on us would ha' dared to pocket the watch under them 'ere circumstances. We all felt it wan't paid fur yet. Cock Roger was a brave feller though, too brave fur the cap'n by half. He went about his business jest as if nothin' had happened, but he'd better ha' been the one to cave in. It wan't natural in the cap'n, an' it wan't safe. The watch cost Roger a big enough price 'fore he'd done with it."

"You think it cost him his life," said George.

"*Think*, Mister George! I *thought* so at the time; now I *know*. It was the night 'fore we sailed that they had the row. The cap'n managed to keep Roger busy ashore until he had sent us all aboard. Them two were to foller some time arter midnight in the cap'n's gig. Only one on 'em ever come up the ship's side. 'Roger was late,' the cap'n said, 'the tide sarved, an' he couldn't wait fur him. No great loss,' he muttered; and then he give orders to weigh anchor an' be off. The tide sarved, no doubt, an' swept Cock Roger inter etarnity. It was no wonder the cap'n couldn't wait, — an' as to missin' him, — wal, I never heard much said on that score, an' there were no questions asked; but there was one aboard, I can tell yer, that missed him, an' mistrusted the end he'd come ter, an' often expected in a dark night to see his ghost come climbing up the bowsprit. He was a handsome, light complectered feller, Mister Geordie, an' about your height an' build, — the best o' the gang an' the most of a man, to my thinkin'. Give 'em fair play an' he'd ha' beat Bullet, out an' out; an' so the rascal give him foul play, which was more in his line, — an' p'raps saved Cock Roger arter all from a wuss fate. There's a sayin', yer know, 'them that are born to be hung'll never be drowned,' — an' Cock Roger was meant fur a better fate than the cap'n's a comin' ter, if he

was a London cockney, an' Bullet, as he purtended, a gentleman born."

Bly would have dilated at length upon the event which had been elucidated and explained by the comparison of facts between himself and George; but George, sickened and shocked at the final act of depravity thus exhibited, shrank from further comments or details, and was glad to escape at length from the presence of Bly, and from the picture of crime which together they had conjured up. For Bly's sake too, he forbore dwelling upon a topic calculated to excite the angry emotions which true benevolence sought to quiet and dissipate in the mind of the dying man. He devoutly trusted that the veil being at length removed from the last of those mysteries which the hand of Bullet had woven, he should be spared any further acquaintance with the vile practices of one whose career had been so singularly interwoven with his own.

One phase, however, still remained to the completion of the moral portrait of a man, the cruel depravity of whose nature seemed only equalled by its corresponding meanness and cowardice.

"You've been paying a visit to poor Bly, I believe, sir," was the remark addressed to George by the prison chaplain, whom he met in one of the corridors just after leaving the sick man's cell.

George assented by an affirmative nod, and added a few words of compassion for the prisoner's wasted and hopeless condition.

"Yes," responded the minister, an earnest intelligent missionary, whose services at the prison were voluntarily rendered. "It's a terrible thing to see death fasten itself upon a fellow-being whose abuse of life has steeped him soul and body in corruption already, and yet Bly isn't the worst man in the world. His ignorance of everything except what the animal instincts teach is pitiable. His appeal on the score of this ignorance of good, and of that early initiation into evil which was the only education he ever had, is almost

childlike, and touches me deeply. It is an appeal which will avail him, I am sure, at Heaven's bar, though I am by no means hopeless that he will carry with him there the more certain passport of a penitent and forgiven soul. No, Bly is not the worst man I ever saw; but I'll tell you, Captain Rawle, who is;" and pointing towards the door of a vaulted and well-secured cell in which Bullet was awaiting his execution, the chaplain continued, in a sad and meditative tone, "That man there has revealed to me more of the possible degradation of our human nature than I ever saw before, or expect to see again. His crimes have not the same palliation as those of Bly, or the other poor fellows of his gang. He has evidently had some early opportunities, and at least affects education and refinement, though he has debased them into education in sin and refinement in cruelty. God knows the processes by which his heart has been turned to flint, and God has the means, I doubt not, to soften it. But I have lost all hope of serving as His instrument."

"He scoffs at religion, I daresay," remarked George; "insults you, perhaps, when you name it to him."

"Oh, that wouldn't discourage me," replied the chaplain. "I have not laboured in our city prisons these ten years without being used to all that. But my time, or rather God's time, usually comes at last, and I have learned to wait patiently for it. The scoffer discourages me the least of all men, — especially in cases of criminals condemned to death."

"Bullet, then, does not fear death?"

"Ah, captain, there's my trouble and the secret of my discouragement. The man is so entirely possessed with and given over to this fear, that he is insensible to everything else. I don't mean fear of the hereafter; I can't detect a spark of that. It is simply an abject, craven fear of the gallows. As the time draws near for his execution, he is losing all his self-control; even his pride and impudence are forsaking him. He creeps to the very knees of the head-gaoler, and entreats the lowest turnkeys to solicit the mercy of Government for

him. During the time that I spend with him, he can speak and think of nothing but the chances of a reprieve. There is not, of course, a shadow of chance for him, and I have told him so plainly."

"But he cannot realize it? — will not believe it?"

"He will believe nothing — realize nothing but this nightmare of dread. The attendants ridicule and despise the poor wretch; and even I, Captain Rawle, in spite of my cloth," — and here the clergyman seemed to address George confidentially (everybody somehow recognized and confided in George's sympathetic qualities), — "I confess to you that I had hoped to find in this bad man the one virtue of courage, — even though it were of the ruffianly sort. It would have been a better groundwork of hope than a state of mind that is debasing and brutalizing him to the last degree. Upon my word, I believe it will end in their being compelled to drag him to the gallows at last. Young man, you are a Christian; I know it by your deeds of charity to Bly," — and the minister grasped George's hand; "pray for me that I may be inspired with some power to help and sustain this degraded fellow-creature!"

But prayers and efforts failed to arrest the fulfilment of the chaplain's prophecy; and when the day of execution came, it was verified to the letter.

Here was revenge for Hannah, if she still sought and coveted it. But Hannah was not so unlike the rest of the community that she could derive satisfaction from such horrors. Hannah's mood was altered, humbled. She sat often with the Bible open on her lap, reading chiefly, I must confess, the psalms of deliverance and the prophetic warnings of an avenging God; but she listened now in silence, sometimes in tears, to reports that from time to time reached her of the sufferings and penitence of Bly, and showed no such bitter rancour towards Bullet as might once have been anticipated from her.

I do not think she would have liked to have them go free and unpunished altogether of God or man. Her ideas of

justice and retribution were still stringent. But she did not now seek to have any voice in the matter. "She had washed her hands of them," she said, "and was content to leave them in the hands of Heaven and the law."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A Farewell Glimpse.

WE have taken the liberty to pry into the secrets, probe the hearts, and sift the lives of the inmates of the Rawle cottage for five years past. What forbids our taking one more observation before bidding them farewell?

It is now about three weeks since George's return. It is a cold, clear afternoon in January — so cold that the snow, which is spread a foot deep over the Jersey meadows, is incrustated with a firm icy surface, so clear that the polished crust shines like a silver mirror. But it is warm as well as bright in-doors — for George an hour ago brought in a famous back-log and forestick, and piled the dry wood on top of them in a workmanlike manner, so that the fireplace is primed for a long winter's night. It is the one leisure-hour of the day, between the early dinner and the equally primitive tea-time; when the kitchen is a model of neatness, when there is nothing especial expected of anybody, when even the cat stretches herself more at her ease, and purrs undisturbed in front of the fire; her paws just dipped in the warm ashes which fringe the bed of glowing embers. It is the hour when Hannah and Margery are accustomed to take a serious and premeditated pinch of snuff, when Hannah subsides into a nap, and Margery into a fit of meditation under the influence of this grateful little indulgence; when the teakettle, pushed out to the end of the crane, ceases its hissing; when no business is persevered in except on the part of the old clock, which keeps up its ticking behind the door, and of Angie's fingers, which, like those of the faithful timepiece, are impelled by such a spirit of industry that they are rarely known to be idle.

The monotonous regularity of this non-occupation or semi-activity has been somewhat invaded since George's return. Only the other day it was at this hour that he resumed the unpacking of his sea-chest; and now, again, to-day he has been claiming Angie's attention for a half-hour or more. They have not been disturbing the old folks, however, — for their employment has been an exclusive and quiet one, though mutually satisfactory. George has had the charts of his recent voyages spread upon the floor (there was no table in the house large enough), and he and Angie together have been tracing his ship's course, by means of the delicate lines pricked out with the point of a pin.

Nothing could in themselves be more void of interest than these charts, — blank white sheets, intersected by lines of latitude and longitude, relieved only by here a sunken reef, there an insignificant group of islands. But George, who read in the long, serpentine course of his ship, traced by him from day to day, the history of all those storms and lulls, head winds and calms, by the baffling or braving of which he had reached at last his desired haven, found in it a lively interest. To Angie it was but a line of dots, to be sure; but love can fill a space no larger than a pin's point with visions as boundless as love itself, and Angie, seeing in each scarce perceptible dot a day of George's experience, felt, in thus recapitulating his voyages with him, that they were living over again together months and years of cruel separation.

So they have been very happy over the charts; but even making as they did the most of it, it was a short-lived enjoyment. The charts are done with, are rolled up and placed upright in one corner, George is sitting at a window amusing himself with a book — an old history of travels — which he had found somewhere; Angie has resumed her work at an opposite window; a handkerchief, I think it is, which she is hemming, one of those grass-cloth handkerchiefs which people who go to sea are so apt to bring home, — a full-sized handkerchief, — so she must be hemming it for George himself. It is a satisfaction to me, knowing him so well, to

believe that among all the rare articles he has brought for other people, there is at least one trifling thing destined for his own use.

But he interrupts her again. This time it is something in his book which he wants to read to her. George is of such a sympathetic nature, that he never can enjoy anything alone; no, it is a print, a little woodcut, which he has discovered, and which she must see, for he crosses the room to show it to her. Now he stands leaning over her shoulder, pointing out this and that to her notice. "This is just the way they build their houses in Surinam. That must be a mangrove-tree; I've seen precisely such growing out there," he adds, by way of illustrating the pictures. "And look here!" turning the page, "you must read that description: this book is an account of travels in South America, and I can assure you it's all true." Then, as she reads, interrupting herself frequently with exclamations of interest or surprise, he confirms the text in a low voice with — "Oh, the sail up that river is delightful! You will like it, I am sure; I was thinking of you all the time I was there." Or — "How I longed to have you breathing that delicious climate he tells about; it will do you a world of good; it's just what you need, Angie!" which last significant hint of his anticipations Angie does not hear, or pretends not to understand, for she makes no response — but seems absorbed in the book, so much so that George forbears to interrupt her further until she shall have finished the passage.

Meanwhile Hannah had been sleeping soundly; Margery, too, quite unobservant of the young people, had been dreaming some pleasant daydream or other, which was none the less pleasant, that it suddenly terminated in a long-drawn "Heigh-ho!"

"Hallo! what's that I hear?" exclaimed George, turning towards her in glad surprise. "Why, mother, that's welcome to my ears as an old tune! I thought I'd missed something. What's become of all the "heigh-ho's" and "ho-hum's" that I have been used to from a boy?"

"Dearie me, George!" responded Margery, (George smiling significantly, as another of the old expressions thus fell from her lips), "I've had to smother my griefs, and swallow them of late. They come to the surface now — that's all."

"And what's the matter, then, mother?" he asked, with mock seriousness, for it was easy enough for anybody to see that Margery was now-a-days the embodiment of content, as she had formerly been of woe.

"Alack a-day! Nothing, child, only I was thinking whether or no that pickle I made for the green ham didn't want seeing to;" and rising with alertness, the rejuvenated old woman trotted off to the pantry, where most of the work of the household was carried on.

"It does my heart good to see her," commented George, as, having watched her brisk step through the doorway, he turned again towards Angie. "It's wonderful how she's coming round. Why, she looks ten years younger already!"

"She does," returned Angie, in cordial assent, "and feels younger too;" an opinion which Angie proceeded to illustrate, by a comparison of Margery's former feebleness and incapacity with her present activity and personal oversight of the household offices, which Hannah, who is her sister-in-law's senior by many years, and who is now more than willing to sink into the repose of old age, fortunately does not seem to begrudge her.

"They'll not miss you so very much, after all, Angie," continued George. "It would be vanity in you to believe the contrary. We shall be back here again before Midsummer, and, please God, find them well and hearty as ever."

To which Angie only responded by shaking her head from side to side, in the negative fashion, and bending lower than ever over her work.

But George, meanwhile, was playfully trying to wrest her work from her, expostulating against it as unnecessary, and throwing out broad hints concerning a certain piece of India

muslin (one of his gifts), which it was quite time for her to commence operations upon.

"You'll want it made up very soon, you know," he whispered; "you must wear it the day we send for the dominie; and in Surinam half-a-dozen such dresses won't be too many; they all wear white in Surinam. I wonder what they'll say to you out there" (with unmistakable elation in his tone); "I wonder how they'll like you, my friend Harry, and the rest of them?"

"Not at all!" murmured Angie, "not at all! Don't speak of it, George; it can't be; it mustn't be. I've seen so many wretched days — the life, the spirit, is all gone out of me. I never shall be bright or young again; it might have been once — but not now."

To which George simply said, "Nonsense!"

And then, when she persisted, sighed, and let a tear drop on her work, he snatched the work from her hand, told her she was nervous, depressed; that he was sure she must be ill; she needed fresh air and change of scene. She must go to New York with him the next day; see the fashions, and visit the landlady of "The Pipe and Bowl," who only yesterday was inquiring for her; "and meantime," he said cheerily, putting his arm round her waist, lifting her from her chair, and at the same time giving her a hearty kiss (saucy fellow, he made nothing of kissing her now-a-days), "come and take a walk with me; it will do you good!"

"But I am serious, George," sobbed Angie, trying, though quite in vain, to evade both his petition and caress. "You know I love you — shall always love you; but you must let me stay here with the old folks. It's better so. Besides, I'm not worthy of you — you're so good, and I — I — wronged you so; I don't feel somehow as if I deserved to be happy."

"You think, because you've been miserable so long, you're bound to be so always! and because I've had to wait five years for my wife, I'm never to have her! and because you've wronged me — though I don't allow that, Angie, and if you love me, you'll never speak of it again — I'm not to be

righted at last. O Angie! you're a silly girl, and your reasoning is absurd beyond anything. Come, get your things! I never saw anybody that needed the fresh air more than you do!"

This was not the first time that Angie had thus disparaged herself, and tried to convince George of her unworthiness to be his wife; possibly it was the last. But things were changed since their old days of courtship, when George's love shrank abashed at every obstacle raised by Angie. The resolution, the confidence, were all on his side now; and what argument or raillery failed to accomplish, were brought about through powers in which he had gained wonderful proficiency during those years of suffering and banishment which had developed and invigorated his manhood. But love's eloquence expressed itself in whispers, which it would be meanness to overhear, treachery to make public, and in looks that love only can interpret; so, though Angie's scruples on the present occasion were not silenced by George's reasoning, the looks and words of love that prevailed at last, and left the victory with him, must be matters of suspicion, except so far as they were revealed by the smiles and blushes, which, as she left the room in gentle and compliant mood to prepare for her walk, shone through her tears and played over her face in rainbows.

She returned, equipped in cloak and hood, a new scarlet cloak, — Hannah's gift. Hannah, who had always kept the purse, had, it seemed, a secret hoard, and was resolved that Angie — "our Angie," as she called her — should be fit to be seen, now that she went regularly to church with the captain; and the faded hood was freshened up, too, with wonderful art, and boasted a bright cherry lining to match the cloak.

With what mutual satisfaction they set forth on their wintry excursion! How exultantly they breasted the clear sharp wind, drawing in new life and exhilaration of spirits at every breath! How daintily and cautiously Angie trod the glittering snow-crust at first, and with what a bold elastic step at length, as she gradually acquired confidence in her

own sure-footedness, and realized what a firm stay she possessed in the arm on which she leaned.

How strongly and tenderly George supported the dear girl, and guided her steps! With what joy and pride he gazed upon her, as she tripped lightly beside him! And she was a pretty object, even for less partial eyes than George's. The scarlet cloak and hood produced such a gay and jaunty effect, sported on her graceful figure, and contrasted with the spotless snow. Her cheeks, still pale and not quite so rounded as they had once been, glowed with exercise and caught radiance from the gorgeous clouds that fringed the western horizon, and the saucy wind curled and rippled the jetty locks that escaped coquettishly from her hood (it must be confessed, though I whisper it between the bars of a parenthesis, that a dash of the old coquetry, the French *comme il faut*, had again crept into Angie's dress and air, though her character was guiltless of its taint). I wonder if George had ever detected any diminution in the beauty which he had worshipped of yore. I'll warrant not. He was not one to spy out flaws or detect imperfections in the woman he loved. His heart was sure rather to idolize its object. Worn, harassed, distressed, Angie had appeared to him at first — but how could it be otherwise? There was cause enough for it, Heaven knew. The change, great as it was, had but proved a fresh claim to his tenderness and sympathy, and since then — why, she was more beautiful than ever in his eyes.

Nor were his eyes so far wrong either.

If love is often deceived and blind, it is none the less certain that happiness is a miraculous beautifier, and joy had day by day been illumining, harmonizing, rejuvenating, the form and features of Angie, until the once dashing and brilliant traits of the girl were put to shame by the softer graces of her purified and ripened womanhood. So George was not so very far wrong when, in answer to Angie's protest against some excessive adulation of his, on the ground that she was too old and faded now to be cheated as she used to be by flattery, he exclaimed, "Why, Angie, I was just thinking

that if you kept on improving at the rate you have for the last five years, you'd be an angel before your time."

Yes, it really seemed a pity that these two had the road all to themselves this winter afternoon, they were such a handsome couple, such an ornament to the landscape. George, so vigorous, wellformed, and manly; Angie, so graceful, piquant, and radiant; and both so animated with the sentiment which is the soul of all beauty. They did not think it a pity, however. All the world could not have added to the happiness they had in one another. A single presence more intrusive than that of the little snow-birds that now and then hopped in their path might, and probably would, have subtracted something from the ecstasy of pleasure with which, "the world forgetting and by the world forgot," they moved with buoyant, almost dancing steps, over the polished snow-crust, defying winter and with a whole ripe summer in their hearts.

They made a circuit of some three miles in their walk, returning by the way of the tavern, where, according to their intention at setting out, they stopped and went in. A visit to the tavern was now, on their part, of daily occurrence at least. What a sudden change of scene, from the bracing air and sunset glow without to the close atmosphere and dark gloomy aspect of the tavern kitchen, where, on their entrance, old Stein, restless and nervous, was groping about, fumbling now and then at the drawers of an old secretary and shivering with cold; for the fire on the hearth had been suffered, perhaps encouraged, to go out, and the solitary stick of wood had split into two thin and blackened brands, which stood upright against the andirons. George walked to the fireplace, and taking the tongs stirred the smouldering embers, relaid the fuel and kindled a blaze, unrebuked of his uncle, who stood vacantly looking on, and when the flame was lighted, crept up and spread his thin hands in front of it, with the same satisfaction with which he would once have warmed himself at somebody's else fire.

Angie, in the meantime, had proceeded directly upstairs

to a comfortable upper room, the door of which stood ajar. She had no occasion to knock, — she was too frequent, too welcome a visitor to this room to stand an ceremony. An instant's pause at the threshold however, and an oblique cast of the head, told how attentively, anxiously, she was listening to the deep, hard-drawn breathing of some sufferer within; then instinctively unclasping her red cloak, and throwing it, as also her gay hood, over the baluster of the staircase (such gay trappings were out of place here), the neat figure, clad in sober-brown, slid noiselessly, as was her wont, into the sick room. She was welcomed by a thin, imploring hand, a gesture of distress and an "Oh, Angie!" that was more expressive than any complaint.

"You don't feel so well, do you, Polly?" she said in a sympathetic tone, as she lifted the sufferer's head and rearranged her pillow. "Have you had your drops?" and on Polly's making a sign in the negative, Angie took bottle and spoon from the mantelpiece and administered the dose with the confidence of one to whom the act was familiar. Then she sat down beside the bed awhile, noted and inquired pitifully concerning each increased symptom of pain, and tried to soothe and comfort the poor thing, who moaned like a fretful, exhausted child. And when at last she had moaned herself into an uneasy doze, Angie moved gently about the room, prepared medicine and nourishment for the night, and then, as Polly still slept, crept downstairs to the kitchen. Here George was equally engaged in an office of sympathy and benevolence, for Stein, with chair drawn up close beside that of his nephew, was making mysterious and confidential communications to him, and with an agonized expression was seeking his aid and advice. This was not unusual. Frequently since George's return he had been summoned to the tavern, to protect the feeble old man from the assaults of his son, who, though broken and enfeebled by the grossest intemperance, became, when fully inflamed by liquor, intractable and dangerous, especially to his father, against whom on these occasions he always seemed infuriated. This danger

and dread was averted for the present by the agency of George, who since Polly came home to die, had found it more than ever important to dispose of Peter and secure the peace of the household, by consigning him to the county gaol, where he had often already been temporarily committed on charges of drunkenness, and where for the present he was confined.

But for George, Polly would have breathed out her life among outcasts, possibly died of starvation. He had found her by chance in some wretched haunt, to which he had been led with the benevolent purpose of seeking out and rescuing some of his sailors. Anyone else might have striven in vain to win her back to the protection of home and friends; but if there had ever been, beside love for her child, one pure and unselfish sentiment to redeem Polly's nature from its corrupting associations, it was an admiring affection for her cousin George, an implicit faith in his goodness. She was just then, too, subdued to an unwonted docility, for her four-year old babe, that had only half-blossomed into life, and that yesterday, blasted as it were by its father's evil eye, had sunk into the torpor of death, had that very day been buried out of her sight. So, indifferent as to what became of her now, she had suffered him to lead her away. And the encouragements he had held out to the lost creature, — the promise of pardon, protection, care, and kindness, — had been faithfully fulfilled. He had done for her all that man could do, and Angie had done the rest.

But it was not of his children that Diedrich Stein was mysteriously whispering to George. The burden of the old man's thoughts was now, as it had ever been, dollars and cents, — yes, literally, the burden; in spite of all his disappointments, all his shame, the bitterest burden of all was his hoarded gold. Domestic sorrows, the blighting of his fondest hopes, the debility of old age, the approaching shadow of the grave, — these had doubtless brought him to his present pass; for Stein had enjoyed his petty rule, had loved his children, had clung to life, had feared to die. But he was

insensible to these things now; his mind had become vacant, except on one point; he was petrified to this world's grief, anxiety, disappointment, dread; and still there was one burden which weighed upon him — the weight of his own gold. Oh, strange retribution! That the craft, the greed, the selfishness of a lifetime should end in this! That all the motives, all the diplomacy, all the artifices of a subtle mind, should merge into one solitary purpose, and that purpose — restitution. Yet so it was. Call it superstition, call it morbid eccentricity. Call it a heart haunted by avenging demons, that thwart its own will; or follow after charity, and call it rather a conscience awakened, a soul touched and taught of God, — the result of this misspent life was the simple effort to atone. To recompense to every man his dues; to seek out, often by long and tiresome effort, each unconscious subject of double-dealing or fraud, and to transmit to him through some safe and unsuspected channel his exact rights, and no more (for Stein was miserly, even in his acts of indemnity), now engrossed the only unclouded remnant of the old man's faculties.

And George, the chief creditor, and destined to be the natural heir of his uncle, was also the sole confidant and abettor of that scheme of restitution to which it may well be believed his honest nature lent itself with alacrity. Thus the frequent conferences between him and Stein; thus the many transactions in which they were mutually engaged; and thus when Angie softly entered the room, and laid her hand on George's shoulder to arrest his attention, a nervous start on the part of Stein, an abrupt jerking back of his chair, and mysterious gestures and hints of secrecy directed towards his nephew.

"She's worse, George," said Angie. "I shan't leave her to-night."

George looked up, interpreted the expression of her face, and said approvingly, "That's right, I wouldn't;" then added, "I shall stay, too, of course; you may want me."

Angie thought not — said he had better go home, and

come over for her in the morning; but he was resolute, and it was well he was so. It would have been too sad a night for Angie to spend alone, — and neither Stein, nor a solitary woman-servant nearly as decrepid as himself, could be counted anybody. So he went back to the cottage, gave notice of their intended absence, and brought back a comfortable supper and some hot coffee for his uncle and Angie, and the old blue mandarin, to keep the latter comfortable during her long watch. Then, when everything was quiet for the night, he took his station at the kitchen fire, and remained there, broad awake and listening, until just before dawn, when Angie called him.

“George,” she said, in a suppressed voice, “come!” In an instant he was at the head of the staircase, whence the voice proceeded. “She’s going fast,” whispered Angie; “she is talking — talking to her dead child! I want you to hear her — it is so touching.”

She was rambling in her talk, and for the most part incoherent; but now and then an expressive word, a connected phrase, revealed the hopes, the yearnings, the visions of a soul just vibrating between this world and the next. Already in spirit she had crossed the boundary, and in the dim distance saw the land where they dwell of whom Christ has said that of such is the kingdom of Heaven. Often since the death of her child vague intimations had dropped from her lips of a faith born of ignorance, but exalted by love, — a strange unreasoning, pathetic faith, — which promised her that she should some day walk in white, hand in hand with the little one now in glory — her sins all purged, her guilt all washed away, for the sake and by the power of her child — transfigured, her innocent one made immortal.

And this simple faith, this soul-assuring confidence, was triumphant in her now. She did not see the watchers by her bedside; her glazed eyes were raised upward in rapt vision; her thin, wasted arms outstretched for the eager embrace. “My beauty! my baby! my own!” she cried; “do you see me? do you hear me? It’s mother.” “An angel! — yes, an

angel!" now again she murmured; "the sweetest, the dearest of them all! No tears! — no cold! — no hunger, darling! Oh, I'm so glad. Happy land! — happy land! And I — I'm so tired — tired — tired!" and the tired voice died away. Then, with the energy of a fresh hope, "They won't take baby, and not let mother come too? O no! not that — not that!" And once more, in the fervour of a final appeal, "My precious! my pet! my blessing! have you found a place for mother? I'm coming — coming — com—"

The arm dropped heavily — she was gone. Gone, poor untaught soul, to learn, we will trust, in some better land, of a love stronger than a mother's, deeper than death and the grave; gone to seek mercy by the power and for the sake of Him who gave himself a ransom for the sins of many; gone to reap some share, perhaps, in that redemption which, greater than faith — greater than love — is "the infinite charity of God."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Conclusion.

DIEDRICH STEIN outlived both his children (for the torch of Peter's sluggish life, which had blazed up so madly at the close, went out at last in a flash, some time during the spring succeeding Polly's death); but he did not outlive them long, — the three gravestones in the old churchyard all bearing the date of this same year. We will trust that he lived long enough, however, to fulfil the one honest aim of a dishonest career; that his one year of repentance sufficed him for undoing the work of threescore years and ten; and that the heart, haunted by the demons of remorse, went to its last rest swept and garnished.

That George sped well with his suit is placed beyond doubt by the town records, which prove his marriage with Angie to have taken place within three weeks from that point in their courtship where we last left them; and thanks to the fact that half the children of the parish were included in the generous wedding invitation, there are many yet living who have a distinct recollection of that holiday event. The India muslin must have been seasonably taken in hand and gored, fitted, ruffled, and flounced for the occasion, since some of that remote generation testify to the beauty of the bride, set off by a gown of this description; while others remember having overheard their mothers whisper to one another that they had felt of the fabric of the wedding-dress, and that it was as fine as a cobweb. All agree that Dominie Van Zandt looked very imposing, with his powdered hair, his snowy bands and frills, his flowing robe, and his polished knee-buckles; and that weddings now-a-days suffer vastly from the absence of such dignities. These quondam young folks have not forgotten their fidgetiness and impatience during the

long prayer, nor their wonder at the tears shed by their seniors during a brief address to the young couple which succeeded, — an emotional symptom quite inexplicable to the juveniles of the party, considering the feasting there was in prospect, and the universally-conceded fact that the occasion was one of the greatest rejoicing that had ever been known at Stein's Plains.

That George was triumphant also in his scheme of taking Angie with him on his approaching voyage to Surinam — possibly on future and more extended voyages — is evidenced by scraps of foreign correspondence, still preserved in the family archives; by a reciprocal friendship which is known to have existed between her and George's friends at the South American port; by the reputation of an experienced traveller, which she to some extent shared with her husband; and, above all, by the vigorous constitution and renewed youth, which must be at least partially attributed to the change of climate and the healthful sea-breezes which she enjoyed at this crisis of her life.

These experiences, however, must have been compressed into a comparatively brief period, for within a year or two after her marriage she was figuring as the centre and light of a domestic circle, no longer domiciled within the contracted limits of the cross-road cottage, but occupying the wider area of the old tavern, which, together with the Cousin property and the Rawle farm had, partly by the act of restitution, partly by natural inheritance, become vested in George. Indeed, I am inclined to attribute the scrupulous and even niggardly exactness with which Stein weighed and adjusted other claims, to his partiality for those of his nephew, and a desire to do ample justice to one whose wrongs at his hands could not be mathematically computed and atoned for.

It is not probable that Hannah's life was prolonged to the period of emigration from the cottage to the tavern, since the senior memories of the parish can recall only one old woman among the family group, and the picture of her impressed on this memorial tablet is that of a diminutive form and pinched

face, united, however, with an activity of body and retention of the faculties quite unusual at the great age to which she lived. Add to this that her most cheerful salutations and expressions of pleasure, as well as her occasional utterances of anxiety and solicitude, were invariably prefaced with a "Heigh-ho!" or a "Dearie me!" and we may be quite sure that this venerable figure was no other than Margery, come back to end her days in her ancestral home, — not, as formerly, the patient drudge, but promoted to the chief place of ease and honour in the household.

Van Hausen's deeply-grounded prejudice against Angie must have yielded to the influence of time and truth, or been subdued by those thoughtful, winning ways which, in her new relation as George's wife, were more directly brought to bear upon him. Otherwise, the comfort and independence of his bachelor home would never have been superseded by the attractions of the tavern fireside, where he became so thoroughly domesticated, that tradition never fails to refer to this clumsy chip of the old Dutch block — this hearty, simple, four-square man, who might always be seen, especially at twilight, comfortably ensconced in an out-of-the-way corner, his pipe in his mouth, and himself a prey to the privileged children — George's children — who clambered over him, danced around him, took strange liberties with his pipe and his pockets; or, still as mice and safely hid in the shadow of his bulky form, evaded the impending "Bed-time now, children!" and listened with eagerness to his oft-repeated stories, with the hero of which even the youngest was familiar, — uncle Dick's tales invariably ending with, "and that boy was — who do you think?" to which the answer was always correctly given with one voice, "I know! — father!"

Nor, though Van Hausen's admiring love for George constituted the one passion of his otherwise phlegmatic temperament, was he eccentric or singular in his preference, for the long-lost village favourite was destined, in his new career at Stein's Plains, to become more universally and more deserv-

edly popular than in the days when he achieved his early successes and triumphs. Though he is known to have made several voyages, his experience of the sea was but a brief episode in his life compared with the many years when, as landlord, farmer, citizen, and benefactor, he earned for himself the praise, the gratitude, and the good-will of all men. The town and county records bear evidence to the various offices of usefulness and trust which he successively filled, and as justice of the peace he had the enviable reputation of having hushed up or averted more quarrels in one year than his neighbour justices had tried during their whole term of serving.

He was a prosperous man, too; not that he, like his predecessor, knew how to coin money out of men's weaknesses, and necessities; for though the tavern doors were always open to the stranger and the wayfarer, George's hospitalities were too widely extended, and of too liberal an order, to be consistent with success as a publican; and it was less as a landlord than as a shipmaster — less as a shipmaster than as a farmer, that the fortune which he had inherited from his uncle was maintained and multiplied. Still he had, in more than one way, found his vocation, and achieved prosperity; better still, no one envied him; and this, although it was universally conceded that he had the best-managed household, the broadest acres, the fleetest colt (a foal of Nancy's), and the handsomest wife in all the Jerseys. On the contrary, the neighbourhood, which had sympathized with the more adventurous and afflicting experiences of his youth, felt a joy and pride in every success and promotion that fell to the lot of their most worthy citizen; and when the rapid growth of the country had transformed the thinly-settled district, familiarly known as Stein's Plains, into a thriving township, boasting a post-office, and meriting a more honoured name; they were unanimous in bestowing on the place its modern name of Rawley.

And the old tavern, the central point whence our story radiated, and the spot to which we have finally returned, no

longer Stein's, but Rawle's Tavern, is still the centre and nucleus of Rawley — the centre of all the hospitalities, the merry-makings, the social cheer traditional in the place, — the centre, too, where most of the deeds of public spirit, patriotism, and philanthropy which have distinguished the village, caught their impulse or found their spur — the centre towards which young hearts turn, haunted by tender associations with the spot where they were baptized in love, reared in virtue, and consecrated to God; — the centre to which old hearts cling, haunted only now by grateful memories of the blessings which have crowned their days, and by the serene and joyful hopes which gild their sunset.

THE END.



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